The Complete Ukulele Learning Book

A Comprehensive Guide
from Beginner to Advanced

Traditional Hawaiian to Modern Styles

Edited by Baiju Muthukadan

Chord Diagrams • Techniques • Songbook

The Complete Ukulele Learning Book

Edited by Baiju Muthukadan

First Edition, 2026
Revision 7

Copyright © 2026 Baiju Muthukadan
All rights reserved.

All song arrangements are for educational purposes.
Traditional songs are in the public domain.

Draft Edition

This book is a work in progress. Content may be incomplete, contain errors, or change in future revisions.
Feedback and corrections are welcome at baiju.m.mail@gmail.com.

Contents

Preface **xiv**

I Foundations **1**

1 Introduction to the Ukulele **2**
1.1 Quick Start: Your First Sound . . . 2
Hold It . . . 2
Strum It . . . 2
Play Your First Chord . . . 2
1.2 A Brief History . . . 3
Further Reading . . . 3
1.3 Parts of the Ukulele . . . 4
The Headstock . . . 4
The Neck . . . 4
The Body . . . 4
1.4 Ukulele Sizes . . . 5
1.5 Tuning Your Ukulele . . . 6
Re-entrant Tuning vs. Low G . . . 6
How to Tune . . . 7
1.6 Holding the Ukulele . . . 8
Seated Position . . . 8
Standing Position . . . 8
1.7 Reading Chord Diagrams . . . 9
1.8 Reading Tablature (TAB) . . . 10
1.9 About Standard Music Notation . . . 10
Do You Need to Learn Standard Notation? . . . 11
1.10 Summary . . . 11

2 Your First Chords **12**
2.1 The Five Essential Chords . . . 12
C Major . . . 12
A Minor . . . 13
F Major . . . 14
G Major . . . 14

G Seventh . . . 15
2.2 Chord Switching . . . 15
Practice Transitions . . . 16
2.3 Your First Song: Row, Row, Row Your Boat . . . 16
2.4 Common Chord Progressions . . . 17
The "50s Progression" . . . 17
The I-IV-V Progression . . . 17
2.5 Summary . . . 18

3 Essential Strumming 19
3.1 Rhythm Fundamentals . . . 19
Beats and Tempo . . . 19
Measures and Time Signatures . . . 19
3.2 Basic Strumming Technique . . . 20
Right Hand Position . . . 20
Downstrums . . . 20
Upstrums . . . 21
3.3 Essential Strumming Patterns . . . 21
Pattern 1: Four Downstrums . . . 22
Pattern 2: Down-Down-Up . . . 22
Pattern 3: Island Strum . . . 22
Pattern 4: Waltz Pattern (3/4) . . . 23
3.4 The Chunk (Muted Strum) . . . 23
3.5 Dynamics . . . 24
3.6 Keeping Time . . . 25
3.7 Summary . . . 25

4 Building Your Chord Vocabulary 27
4.1 Beyond the First Five . . . 27
4.2 The D Family . . . 27
D Major . . . 27
D Minor . . . 28
D Seventh . . . 28
4.3 The E Family . . . 29
E Major . . . 29
E Minor . . . 31
E Seventh . . . 32
4.4 The A Family . . . 33
A Major . . . 33
A Minor (Review) . . . 33
A Seventh . . . 33
4.5 More Common Chords . . . 34
B Flat Major . . . 34
C Seventh . . . 35
4.6 Major and Minor Relationships . . . 35

4.7 Chord Summary Chart . . . 35
4.8 Summary . . . 36

II Developing Skills **38**

5 Barre Chords **39**
5.1 What Are Barre Chords? . . . 39
5.2 The Barre Technique . . . 39
Forming the Barre . . . 39
Common Problems and Solutions . . . 40
Progressive Barre Conditioning . . . 41
5.3 The Major Barre Shape . . . 42
B♭ Major (First Fret) . . . 42
Moving the Shape . . . 43
5.4 The Minor Barre Shape . . . 43
5.5 Seventh Barre Shapes . . . 44
Dominant Seventh . . . 44
Minor Seventh . . . 45
5.6 A Second Moveable Shape . . . 45
The Shape . . . 45
Moving the Shape . . . 46
5.7 Practice Strategies . . . 46
Building Endurance . . . 47
Mixing Barre and Open Chords . . . 47
5.8 When to Use Barre Chords . . . 47
5.9 Summary . . . 47

6 Seventh Chords and Beyond **49**
6.1 How Chords Are Built . . . 49
The Chromatic Scale . . . 49
Intervals . . . 49
Triads: Three-Note Chords . . . 50
6.2 What Are Seventh Chords? . . . 51
6.3 Dominant Seventh Chords . . . 51
Common Dominant Sevenths . . . 51
6.4 Major Seventh Chords . . . 52
Common Major Sevenths . . . 52
6.5 Minor Seventh Chords . . . 52
Common Minor Sevenths . . . 52
6.6 Diminished Chords . . . 53
6.7 Augmented Chords . . . 54
6.8 Suspended Chords . . . 55
Sus4 Chords . . . 55
Sus2 Chords . . . 55

6.9 Using These Chords Musically . . . 56
6.10 Summary . . . 56

7 Advanced Strumming and Rhythm 57
7.1 Syncopation . . . 57
Offbeat Emphasis . . . 57
Anticipation . . . 57
7.2 Percussive Techniques . . . 58
The Chunk (Review) . . . 58
The Tap . . . 58
The Slap . . . 58
7.3 Compound Time and Swing Feel . . . 59
6/8 Time . . . 59
12/8 Time . . . 59
Swing and Shuffle Feel . . . 60
7.4 Independent Chord Changes . . . 61
The Goal . . . 61
Practice Method . . . 61
7.5 Summary . . . 61

8 Playing in Different Keys 63
8.1 The Major Scale . . . 63
8.2 What Is a Key? . . . 64
8.3 Chords in a Key . . . 64
The Key of C Major . . . 64
The Key of G Major . . . 64
The Key of F Major . . . 65
The Key of D Major . . . 65
The Key of A Major . . . 65
8.4 Transposing Songs . . . 65
Step-by-Step Transposition . . . 65
Quick Transposition Chart . . . 66
8.5 The Nashville Number System . . . 66
How It Works . . . 66
Common Number Patterns . . . 66
8.6 Finding the Right Key for Your Voice . . . 67
8.7 Ukulele-Friendly Keys . . . 67
8.8 Using a Capo . . . 67
8.9 Understanding Song Structure . . . 68
8.10 Summary . . . 69

III Mastery 71

9 Jazz Chords 72

9.1 Beyond Seventh Chords . . . 72
Ninth Chords . . . 73
Add Chords . . . 73
Eleventh and Thirteenth Chords . . . 74
9.2 Sixth Chords . . . 74
9.3 Jazz Voicings . . . 75
Shell Voicings . . . 75
Moveable Jazz Shapes . . . 76
9.4 Chord Substitutions . . . 77
Tritone Substitution . . . 77
Relative Major/Minor . . . 78
Extended Substitution . . . 78
9.5 Essential Jazz Progressions . . . 78
The ii-V-I . . . 78
Rhythm Changes . . . 79
The Jazz Blues . . . 79
9.6 Comping Rhythms . . . 79
Basic Comping Patterns . . . 79
9.7 Summary . . . 80

10 Fingerstyle Techniques **81**
10.1 Fingerpicking Foundations . . . 81
Right-Hand Notation . . . 81
Standard Assignment . . . 81
10.2 Classical Technique . . . 82
Hand Position . . . 82
Rest Stroke vs. Free Stroke . . . 83
10.3 Fingerpicking Patterns . . . 83
Pattern 1: Basic Arpeggio . . . 83
Pattern 2: Pinch Pattern . . . 83
Pattern 3: Travis Picking . . . 84
Pattern 4: Inside-Out . . . 84
Pattern 5: Outside-In . . . 84
Pattern 6: Clawhammer . . . 85
Tremolo . . . 85
10.4 Campanella Technique . . . 87
The Concept . . . 87
Campanella Fingering . . . 87
10.5 Harmonics . . . 87
Natural Harmonics . . . 88
Technique . . . 88
Artificial Harmonics . . . 88
10.6 Expressive Techniques . . . 89
Hammer-Ons . . . 89
Pull-Offs . . . 89

Slides . . . 90
Bends . . . 90
10.7 Arranging for Solo Ukulele . . . 91
Basic Approach . . . 91
Choosing Bass Notes . . . 91
Example: Arranging "Twinkle, Twinkle" . . . 92
10.8 Summary . . . 92

11 Music Theory for Ukulele **94**
11.1 Scales on the Fretboard . . . 94
11.2 Major and Minor Scales . . . 94
The Major Scale on the Fretboard . . . 94
The Natural Minor Scale . . . 95
11.3 The Harmonic Minor Scale . . . 95
11.4 The Circle of Fifths . . . 96
Key Signatures . . . 96
Using the Circle . . . 96
11.5 Modes . . . 97
11.6 The Pentatonic Scale . . . 98
The Blues Scale . . . 98
11.7 Applying Theory to Playing . . . 98
Improvisation . . . 98
Composition . . . 99
11.8 Summary . . . 99

12 Performance and Practice **100**
12.1 Effective Practice . . . 100
Practice Principles . . . 100
The Practice Session Structure . . . 100
Slow Practice . . . 101
12.2 Troubleshooting Common Problems . . . 101
Buzzing Strings . . . 101
Muted Notes . . . 101
Uneven Strumming . . . 102
Slow Chord Changes . . . 102
12.3 Building Musicality . . . 102
Dynamics . . . 102
Timing Nuance . . . 103
Emotional Connection . . . 103
12.4 Preparing for Performance . . . 103
Before the Performance . . . 103
Managing Stage Nerves . . . 103
During the Performance . . . 104
12.5 Continuing Your Journey . . . 104
Finding Your Voice . . . 104

Learning Resources . . . 104
Setting Goals . . . 105
12.6 Learning a New Song . . . 105
Listen and Map the Structure . . . 105
Learn the Chord Progression . . . 105
Master the Transitions . . . 105
Add the Rhythm . . . 105
Add Vocals . . . 105
Polish and Perform . . . 106
12.7 Developing Your Ear . . . 106
Interval Recognition . . . 106
Recognizing Chord Quality . . . 107
Finding the Key of a Song . . . 107
Playing Melodies by Ear . . . 108
Daily Ear Training Routine . . . 109
12.8 Summary . . . 109

IV Songbook **111**

13 Beginner Songs **112**
Row, Row, Row Your Boat . . . 112
Buffalo Gals . . . 113
Tom Dooley . . . 114
Skip to My Lou . . . 115
He's Got the Whole World in His Hands . . . 116
Down in the Valley . . . 117
Camptown Races . . . 118
Kumbaya . . . 119
Amazing Grace . . . 120
Oh! Susanna . . . 121

14 Intermediate Songs **122**
Red River Valley . . . 122
Sloop John B . . . 123
I've Been Working on the Railroad . . . 124
Home on the Range . . . 125
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot . . . 126
House of the Rising Sun . . . 127
When the Saints Go Marching In . . . 128
Clementine . . . 129
Scarborough Fair . . . 130
La Bamba . . . 131
Cielito Lindo . . . 132

15 Advanced Songs **133**
St. James Infirmary . . . 133
Careless Love . . . 134
St. Louis Blues . . . 135
Frankie and Johnny . . . 136
Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen . . . 137
Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho . . . 138
Wayfaring Stranger . . . 139
Aloha 'Oe . . . 140
Greensleeves . . . 141
Hava Nagila . . . 142
Sakura . . . 143
Arirang . . . 144
La Cucaracha . . . 145

V Appendices **146**

A Complete Chord Dictionary **147**
A.1 A Chords . . . 147
A.2 B♭ / A♯ Chords . . . 149
A.3 B Chords . . . 149
A.4 C Chords . . . 150
A.5 D♭ / C♯ Chords . . . 151
A.6 D Chords . . . 152
A.7 E♭ / D♯ Chords . . . 153
A.8 E Chords . . . 154
A.9 F Chords . . . 155
A.10 G♭ / F♯ Chords . . . 157
A.11 G Chords . . . 157
A.12 A♭ / G♯ Chords . . . 159
A.13 Moveable Chord Shapes . . . 159
Major Barre Shape (based on A) . . . 159
Minor Barre Shape (based on Am) . . . 160
Dominant 7th Barre Shape . . . 160
Minor 7th Barre Shape . . . 160

B Strumming Pattern Library **161**
B.1 Basic Patterns (4/4 Time) . . . 162
Pattern 1: All Down . . . 162
Pattern 2: Down-Up . . . 162
Pattern 3: Folk/Pop Basic . . . 162
B.2 Island/Calypso Patterns . . . 162
Classic Island Strum . . . 162
Variation with Accent . . . 163

Double Chunk . . . 163
Calypso . . . 163
Jawaiian . . . 163
B.3 Reggae Patterns . . . 163
One-Drop . . . 163
Skank . . . 164
Ska Upstroke . . . 164
Reggae Chuck . . . 164
B.4 Rock/Pop Patterns . . . 164
Standard Rock . . . 164
Pop Ballad . . . 164
Driving Rock . . . 165
B.5 3/4 (Waltz) Patterns . . . 165
Basic Waltz . . . 165
Boom-Chuck-Chuck . . . 165
Waltz with Upstrums . . . 165
B.6 6/8 Patterns . . . 165
Basic 6/8 . . . 165
Irish/Folk 6/8 . . . 166
B.7 Swing/Jazz Patterns . . . 166
Basic Swing . . . 166
Charleston . . . 166
Jazz Comping . . . 166
B.8 Fingerpicking Patterns . . . 166
Basic Arpeggio . . . 166
Travis Picking . . . 167
Pinch Pattern . . . 167
B.9 Advanced Techniques . . . 167
Split Stroke . . . 167
Triplet Roll . . . 168
Flamenco Rasgueado . . . 168
Triple Strum . . . 168
Fan Strum . . . 169
Thumb Roll . . . 170
B.10 Practice Tips . . . 170

C Ukulele Care and Maintenance 171
C.1 Daily Care . . . 171
Before Playing . . . 171
After Playing . . . 171
C.2 String Care . . . 171
When to Change Strings . . . 171
Changing Strings . . . 172
Stretching New Strings . . . 173
C.3 Cleaning Your Ukulele . . . 173

The Body . . . 173
The Fretboard . . . 173
The Frets . . . 174
C.4 Storage . . . 174
Temperature and Humidity . . . 174
Stands and Cases . . . 175
C.5 Basic Setup and Adjustments . . . 175
Action . . . 175
Intonation . . . 176
Tuning Peg Maintenance . . . 176
C.6 When to See a Professional . . . 176
C.7 Maintenance Checklist . . . 177

D Baritone Ukulele Reference 178
D.1 Understanding DGBE Tuning . . . 178
Comparing Tunings . . . 178
D.2 Chord Conversion Chart . . . 179
Quick Reference: The Interval Relationship . . . 179
D.3 Essential Baritone Chord Diagrams . . . 179
Primary Chords . . . 180
Minor Chords . . . 180
Dominant Seventh Chords . . . 181
Additional Useful Chords . . . 181
D.4 Transposition Guide . . . 181
Scenario 1: Same Shapes, Different Key . . . 181
Scenario 2: Matching the Original Key . . . 181
Same-Key Transposition Reference . . . 182
D.5 Practice Tips for Baritone Players . . . 182

E 30-Day Practice Plan 183

F Left-Handed Ukulele Guide 186

G Chord Progression Reference 191
G.1 Major Key Progressions . . . 191
G.2 Minor Key Progressions . . . 192
G.3 Modal Progressions . . . 192
Dorian Mode . . . 193
Phrygian Mode . . . 193
Lydian Mode . . . 193
Mixolydian Mode . . . 193
Locrian Mode . . . 193
G.4 Key Reference Charts . . . 193
Major Keys . . . 194
Minor Keys . . . 194

H Reading Tablature (TAB) **195**
H.1 TAB Basics . . . 195
H.2 Common TAB Symbols . . . 196
H.3 TAB Examples . . . 196
Single Notes (Melody) . . . 196
Chords in TAB . . . 196
Combining Melody and Chords . . . 196
H.4 Technique Examples . . . 197
Hammer-On and Pull-Off . . . 197
Slides . . . 197
Bends and Releases . . . 197
Muted Strums (Chuck) . . . 198
Vibrato . . . 198
Combined Techniques . . . 198
H.5 TAB vs. Chord Diagrams . . . 199

I Ukulele Buying Guide **200**
I.1 What to Look For . . . 200
Size . . . 200
Construction Quality . . . 200
Budget Guidelines . . . 200
I.2 Reputable Brands . . . 201
I.3 Where to Buy . . . 201
I.4 Essential Accessories . . . 201
I.5 Before You Buy: Checklist . . . 201

J Standard Music Notation **203**
J.1 Why Learn Standard Notation? . . . 203
J.2 The Staff . . . 203
J.3 Notes on the Staff . . . 204
The Ukulele Range . . . 204
J.4 Note Values and Rests . . . 204
Dotted Notes and Ties . . . 205
J.5 Time Signatures . . . 205
Bar Lines and Repeat Signs . . . 205
J.6 Key Signatures . . . 205
J.7 Reading Ukulele Music . . . 206
Example: "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" . . . 206
J.8 Common Symbols . . . 207
Dynamics . . . 207
Tempo Markings . . . 207
Articulation and Expression . . . 208
J.9 Standard Notation vs TAB vs Chord Diagrams . . . 208

Glossary of Terms **209**

Preface

Welcome to *The Complete Ukulele Learning Book*. Whether you've just picked up your first ukulele or you're looking to expand your skills, this book will guide you through the wonderful world of this versatile instrument.

The ukulele has experienced a remarkable renaissance in recent years, and for good reason. It's portable, affordable, and surprisingly capable of producing beautiful music across many genres—from traditional Hawaiian melodies to jazz, pop, and classical arrangements.

Why This Book

Many ukulele resources focus on either absolute beginners or advanced players, leaving a gap in between. This book takes a different approach: it provides a single, continuous path from your very first chord all the way to jazz voicings, fingerstyle technique, and confident performance. Each concept builds on what came before, so you're never left wondering what to learn next.

The emphasis throughout is on practical, hands-on playing. Theory is introduced only when it directly helps you play better, and every new concept is paired with exercises and songs so you can put it to use right away.

Who This Book Is For

This book is written for teens and adults who want to learn ukulele in a structured, self-paced way. No prior musical experience is required—you don't need to read music or have played another instrument. If you can count to four, you're ready to start.

That said, the book doesn't stop at the basics. If you already play a few chords and want to move beyond simple strumming, you'll find plenty of material in Parts II and III to challenge you. Experienced guitarists switching to ukulele will also find the organized progression helpful for adapting to the instrument's unique tuning and voicings.

What You'll Need

Before you begin, make sure you have the following:

A ukulele. A soprano, concert, or tenor ukulele in standard GCEA tuning will work for everything in this book. If you don't own one yet, Appendix I includes a buying guide to help you choose.

A tuner. An accurate tuner is essential. Clip-on tuners are inexpensive and work well, or you can use a free tuner app on your phone.

A quiet place to practice. You don't need a studio—just a comfortable spot where you can sit upright and focus for 15–20 minutes at a time.

Optional Extras: A music stand makes reading this book while playing much easier. A felt pick and a simple metronome (or metronome app) are also helpful as you progress.

How to Use This Book

This book is organized into four main parts, plus comprehensive appendices:

Part I: Foundations introduces you to the instrument and teaches essential chords and strumming patterns.

Part II: Developing Skills expands your chord vocabulary and introduces barre chords, seventh chords, and different keys.

Part III: Mastery covers advanced techniques including jazz voicings, fingerstyle, and music theory.

Part IV: Songbook provides songs arranged by difficulty level to practice your skills.

Appendices include reference materials: chord dictionaries, strumming patterns, a 30-day practice plan, common chord progressions, care and maintenance tips, a buying guide, and resources for left-handed and baritone players.

Each chapter in Parts I–III begins with learning objectives and includes exercises, tips, and practice routines. Work through the chapters in order, or jump to specific topics as needed. A glossary at the back defines every term, and the index helps you find topics fast.

Conventions Used in This Book

Throughout the book, you'll encounter several types of notation and special elements:

Chord diagrams show you exactly where to place your fingers on the fretboard. Each diagram displays the four strings of the ukulele with dots marking finger positions and numbers indicating which fingers to use.

Tablature (TAB) uses four horizontal lines—one for each string—with numbers showing which fret to play. Special symbols indicate techniques like hammer-ons (h), pull-offs (p), and slides (/). Appendix H covers TAB notation in detail.

Standard notation appears on a five-line staff using the treble clef. You don't need to read standard notation to use this book, but Appendix J provides a full introduction if you'd like to learn.

Strumming patterns use arrows for stroke direction (↓ down, ↑ up), with x marking muted strums and T marking percussive taps. A complete key to the symbols appears in Appendix B.

You'll also find several types of highlighted boxes:

Tips offer practical advice and shortcuts to help you improve faster.

Exercises provide focused drills for specific skills, numbered by chapter for easy reference.

Warnings flag common mistakes and things to watch out for.

Key concepts highlight the most important ideas to remember.

Practice routines at the end of each chapter in Parts I–III give you a structured session plan to consolidate what you've learned.

Milestones mark key achievements and summarize the skills you've gained after completing a section.

How to Practice

Learning an instrument is a marathon, not a sprint. Here are some guidelines to help you get the most from this book:

- **Be consistent.** Practicing 15–20 minutes every day is far more effective than cramming a two-hour session once a week. Keep your ukulele within easy reach so picking it up becomes second nature.
- **Take your time with each chapter.** Plan to spend roughly one to two weeks on each chapter in Parts I and II, and two to three weeks on the more advanced chapters in Part III. Move on when you can play the exercises comfortably, not when you can play them perfectly. If you'd rather follow a day-by-day schedule, Appendix E condenses the whole journey into a 30-day plan.
- **Use the songs.** The Songbook in Part IV is not an afterthought—playing real songs is the best way to reinforce your skills. Try the beginner songs as soon as you finish Part I, and revisit the intermediate and advanced songs as your abilities grow.
- **Follow the practice routines.** Every chapter in Parts I–III ends with a suggested practice routine. These routines combine warm-ups, new material, and review so you build skills efficiently.
- **Be patient with yourself.** Every ukulele player—no matter how accomplished—started exactly where you are now. Some techniques will click immediately; others will take days or weeks. That's completely normal.

Happy strumming!

Part I

Foundations

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Ukulele

In this chapter, you will learn:

- Identify the parts of the ukulele
- Understand the four ukulele sizes
- Tune your ukulele to standard GCEA tuning
- Hold the ukulele correctly
- Understand basic music notation for ukulele

1.1 Quick Start: Your First Sound

Before we dive into history and theory, let's make some music. Within the next few minutes, you'll play your first chord.

Hold It

Sit comfortably and cradle the ukulele body against your chest with your strumming arm. The neck should angle slightly upward. Don't worry about perfect posture yet—we'll refine that later.

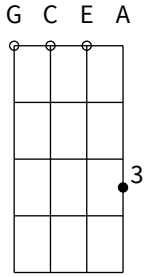
Strum It

With your thumb or index finger, brush downward across all four strings near the sound hole. Congratulations—you've just played a chord! Those four open strings together make an Am7 chord, a perfectly valid sound used in real songs. (The same four notes—G, C, E, A—can also be called a C6 chord; which name applies depends on the musical context. Don't worry about what the "7" or "6" means yet—you'll learn about the "7" in Chapter 6 and the "6" in Chapter 9.)

Play Your First Chord

Now let's play C major, the simplest fretted chord on ukulele:

C



Press your ring finger on the 3rd fret of the bottom string (the A string). Keep the other strings open. Strum all four strings—that's C major, one of the most useful chords in music.

Tip: If it buzzes or sounds muted, adjust your finger position. Don't worry about perfection yet; just enjoy the sound. You'll refine your technique throughout this book.

1.2 A Brief History

The ukulele originated in Hawaii in the late 19th century, adapted from small Portuguese guitars called *machete*, *cavaquinho*, and *rajão* brought by immigrants from Madeira. Three Madeiran woodworkers—Manuel Nunes, José do Espírito Santo, and Augusto Dias—are credited with developing the instrument into the ukulele we know today.

The name "ukulele" roughly translates to "jumping flea" in Hawaiian, perhaps describing the rapid finger movements of skilled players. Queen Lili'uokalani, Hawaii's last reigning monarch and an accomplished musician, offered an alternative translation: "the gift that came here," reflecting the instrument's beloved status in Hawaiian culture.

From its Hawaiian roots, the ukulele quickly gained international popularity in the early 20th century. The 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco introduced Hawaiian music to a wide audience, sparking a global ukulele craze. The instrument became a symbol of the Jazz Age and found enthusiastic communities in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Japan throughout the 20th century. After periods of varying popularity, the ukulele experienced a major revival in the 21st century, embraced by musicians worldwide for its accessibility and charm.

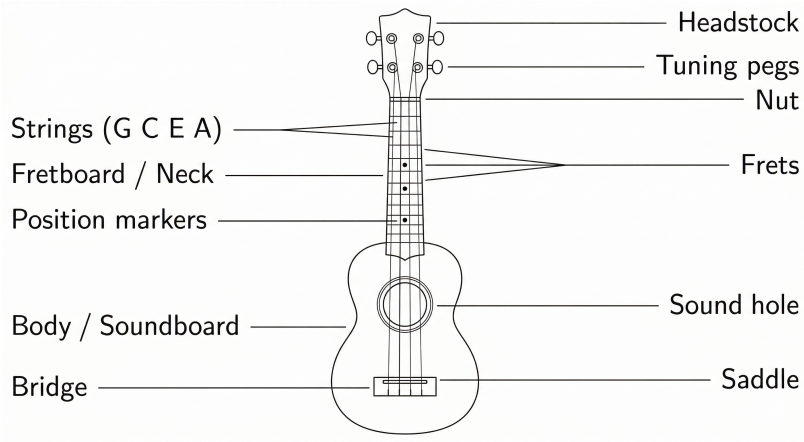
Further Reading

For a deeper look at the ukulele's history and cultural impact:

- Jim Tranquada and John King, *The Ukulele: A History* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2012)—the definitive scholarly history.
- John King, *The Hawaiian Ukulele and Guitar Makers* (Nalu Music, 2001)—covers the early luthiers who shaped the instrument.

1.3 Parts of the Ukulele

Understanding your instrument is the first step to mastering it. Here are the essential parts of the ukulele:



The parts of a ukulele.

The Headstock

The Headstock sits at the top of the instrument and holds the Tuning Pegs (Tuners) (also called tuning machines or tuners). These pegs adjust string tension to change pitch. Most ukuleles have four tuning pegs, one for each string.

The Neck

The **neck** extends from the body and includes:

- Frets: Metal strips embedded in the fretboard that divide it into half-step intervals
- Fretboard (or fingerboard): The flat surface where you press strings
- Nut: A small piece (usually plastic or bone) at the top of the fretboard that guides the strings
- **Position markers**: Dots or inlays at certain frets (usually 5, 7, 10, and 12) for navigation

The Body

The **body** is the large, hollow section that amplifies sound:

- Soundboard (top): The front face that vibrates to produce sound
- Sound Hole: The circular opening that projects sound outward
- Bridge: Holds the strings in place at the body end
- Saddle: A thin piece on the bridge that the strings rest on

1.4 Ukulele Sizes

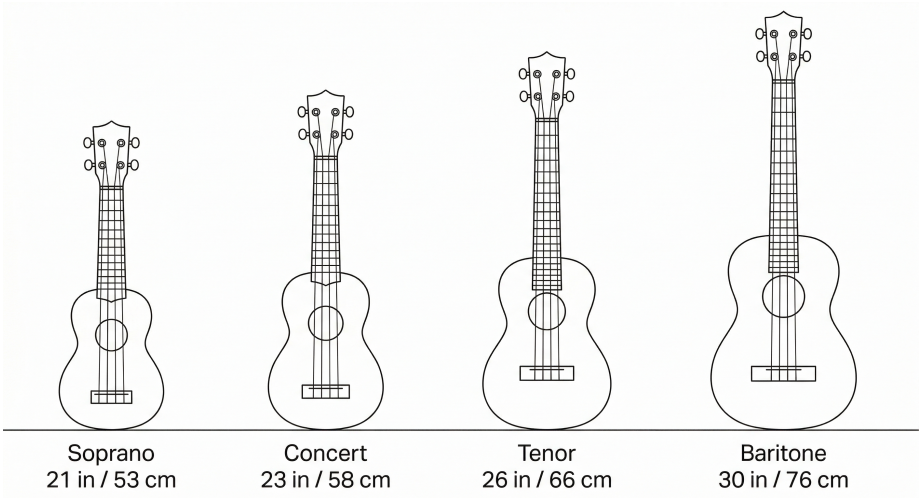
Ukuleles come in four standard sizes:

Soprano The smallest and most traditional size (21 inches). Produces the classic "plinky" ukulele sound. Best for smaller hands or those wanting the authentic Hawaiian tone.

Concert Slightly larger (23 inches) with more frets and volume. A good balance between traditional sound and playability.

Tenor Larger still (26 inches) with deeper tone and more fret access. Popular with professional players and fingerstyle enthusiasts.

Baritone The largest size (30 inches), often tuned differently (DGBE, like the top four guitar strings). Has a deeper, more guitar-like sound.



The four standard ukulele sizes.

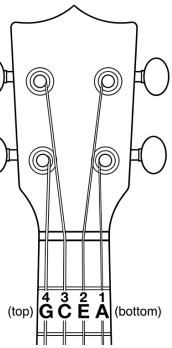
Important Note for Baritone Players: The baritone ukulele uses DGBE tuning (like the top four guitar strings), not standard GCEA tuning. This book's chord shapes work with soprano, concert, and tenor ukuleles in GCEA tuning. Baritone players can find adapted chord charts in Appendix D, or use guitar chord shapes.

Tip: For beginners, a concert or tenor ukulele often provides the best balance of traditional sound and comfortable playability. However, any size works well for learning—choose the one

that feels best in your hands. For detailed advice on choosing and purchasing a ukulele, see Appendix I.

1.5 Tuning Your Ukulele

Standard ukulele Tuning is **GCEA** (from top string to bottom when holding the ukulele):



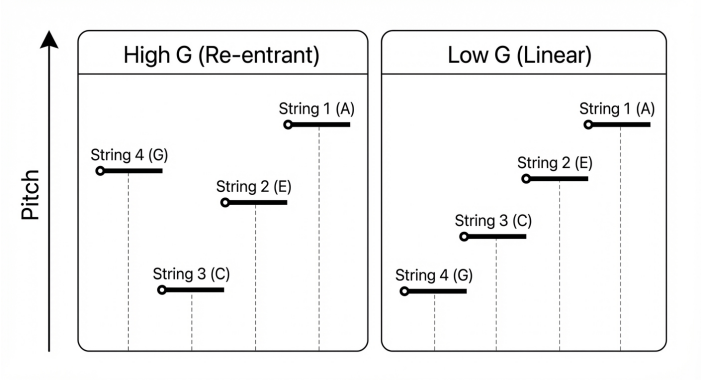
String numbering and standard GCEA tuning.

String	Note	Description
4 (top)	G	High G (re-entrant tuning)
3	C	Lowest pitched string
2	E	
1 (bottom)	A	Highest pitched string

Re-entrant Tuning vs. Low G

Notice that the 4th string (G) is tuned *higher* than the 3rd string (C)—which is why it's called the "high G," even though the A string still sounds highest. This is called Re-entrant Tuning and gives the ukulele its characteristic bright, jangly sound—the signature Hawaiian tone that makes the ukulele instantly recognizable.

Some players prefer Low G Tuning (also called linear tuning), where the G string is tuned an octave lower, matching what you'd expect from string order. This requires a thicker G string—either a wound metal string or an unwound fluorocarbon one (both are included in "low G" string sets). For tips on string changes and general instrument care, see Appendix C.



Re-entrant tuning vs. low G: relative pitch of each string.

Tuning	Character	Best For
High G (re-entrant)	Bright, jangly, traditional	Strumming, Hawaiian music
Low G (linear)	Fuller, deeper bass	Fingerstyle, chord-melody

Choosing a Tuning: Most beginners should start with standard high G tuning—it's what most ukulele music is written for, and it gives you that classic sound. You can always experiment with low G later. The chord shapes stay the same; only the tone changes.

How to Tune

Use one of these methods to tune your ukulele:

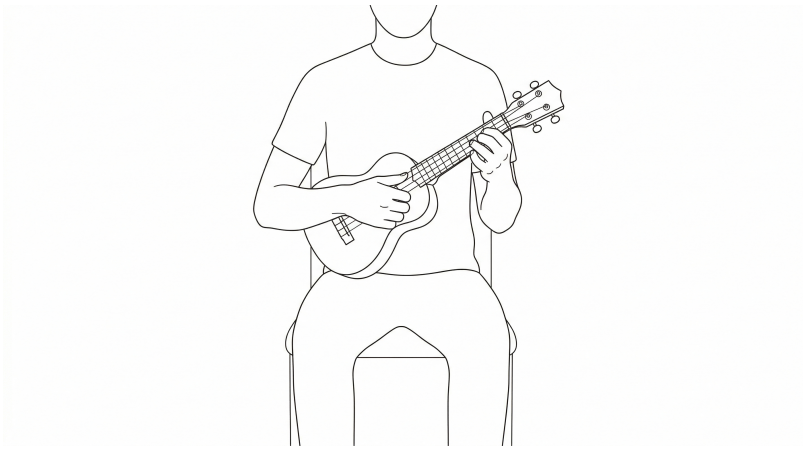
1. **Electronic tuner**: Clip-on tuners are inexpensive and accurate
2. **Tuning app**: Many free smartphone apps work well
3. **Piano or keyboard**: Match each string to the corresponding piano key (all four sit in the octave just above middle C—the C string is middle C itself)
4. **Relative tuning**: Tune strings to each other (useful when no reference is available)

Exercise 1.1: Tuning Practice

Tune your ukulele using an electronic tuner or app. Pluck each string individually and adjust the tuning peg until the tuner shows the correct note. Practice this daily until tuning becomes quick and automatic.

1.6 Holding the Ukulele

Proper posture helps you play comfortably and avoid strain:



Proper seated ukulele posture.

Seated Position

1. Sit up straight in a chair without arms
2. Rest the ukulele body against your chest/stomach
3. The neck should angle slightly upward (about 45 degrees)
4. Cradle the instrument with your strumming arm, applying gentle pressure to hold it in place
5. Keep your fretting hand relaxed with a curved wrist

Standing Position

When standing, you may use a strap or cradle the ukulele the same way. Keep your shoulders relaxed and avoid hunching.

Comfort First: If you feel tension in your shoulders, neck, or wrists, stop and adjust your position. Playing should feel natural and relaxed.

For Left-Handed Players: All instructions and diagrams in this book assume right-handed orientation (strumming with the right hand, fretting with the left). Left-handed players have two options:

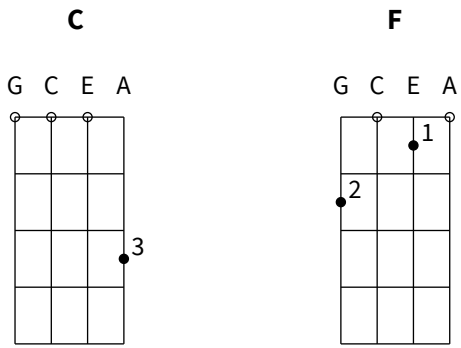
1. **Play right-handed**—many lefties play in standard orientation, which lets you use any ukulele and follow diagrams as written.

2. **Restring for left-handed play**—reverse the string order (so the A string is closest to your face and the G string is closest to the floor) and use the mirrored chord diagrams in Appendix F.

Either approach works well; choose whichever feels more natural.

1.7 Reading Chord Diagrams

Throughout this book, you'll see Chord Diagrams that show where to place your fingers. Here is the C major chord, the simplest fretted chord on ukulele, alongside F major, which uses two fingers:



How to read a chord diagram:

- **Vertical lines** represent the four strings (G-C-E-A from left to right)
- **Horizontal lines** represent frets
- **Dots** show where to place your fingers
- **Numbers inside dots** indicate which finger to use (1=index, 2=middle, 3=ring, 4=pinky)
- **Open circles** (○) above a string mean play it open—without pressing any fret
- **X** above a string means don't play that string (mute it or skip it)
- **Position numbers** on the side indicate which fret the diagram starts from (for chords higher up the neck)
- **Thick bars** across multiple strings indicate a *barre*—one finger pressing several strings at once (covered in Chapter 5)

1.8 Reading Tablature (TAB)

Tablature (TAB) (or TAB) is a visual notation showing exactly which fret to play on which string. Unlike standard music notation, TAB doesn't require reading notes—you just follow the numbers.

```
A |---0---3---0---|
E |---0---0---0---|
C |---0---0---0---|
G |---0---0---2---|
```

How to read TAB:

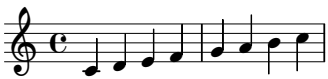
- Each line represents a string (A on top, G on bottom)
- Numbers indicate which fret to press (0 = open string)
- Read left to right, like text
- Numbers stacked vertically are played together (a chord)

Those three chords are Am7, C major, and A minor—the first two are exactly the sounds you made in Section 1.1.

Tip: This book primarily uses chord diagrams, but you'll encounter TAB in many online resources. See Appendix H for more TAB examples and notation symbols.

1.9 About Standard Music Notation

Standard Notation uses symbols on a five-line staff to represent pitch and rhythm. While this book uses chord diagrams and TAB, you may encounter standard notation in other resources. Here is an example—a C major scale written in standard notation:



A C major scale in standard notation.

Key differences from TAB:

- **Shows pitch**: Notes on higher lines/spaces sound higher
- **Shows rhythm**: Note shapes indicate duration (whole, half, quarter notes)

- **Universal**: Same notation works for all instruments
- **Steeper learning curve**: Requires learning note names and positions

Do You Need to Learn Standard Notation?

For most ukulele players, **no**—chord diagrams and TAB are sufficient. Consider learning standard notation if you:

- Want to read classical or jazz arrangements
- Plan to play with other musicians reading from sheet music
- Are interested in music theory at a deeper level

Tip: This book focuses on chord diagrams and TAB because they're practical and quick to learn. If you later want to explore standard notation, see Appendix J for a guided introduction.

1.10 Summary

You now know the essential parts of the ukulele, the four sizes available, how to tune to standard GCEA, proper holding technique, how to read chord diagrams, and the basics of tablature. In the next chapter, you'll learn your first chords and start making music!

Practice Routine:

1. Identify all parts of your ukulele without looking at this book
2. Tune your ukulele at the start of each practice session
3. Practice holding the ukulele in both seated and standing positions
4. Ensure you can read the chord diagram examples correctly

Chapter 2

Your First Chords

In this chapter, you will learn:

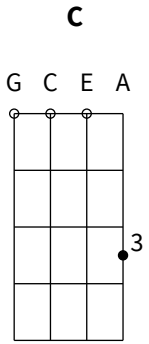
- Play five essential chords: C, Am, F, G, and G7
- Switch smoothly between chords
- Play your first song using two chords
- Understand chord families and common progressions

2.1 The Five Essential Chords

These five Chords will allow you to play hundreds of songs. Master these before moving on to more complex shapes.

C Major

The C chord is the simplest ukulele chord—just one finger! It has a bright, open sound that feels like home base in many songs.



Fingering:

- Place your ring finger (3) on the 3rd fret of the A string (bottom string)
- The other three strings are played open (unfretted)

Tip: Press down firmly with the tip of your finger, just behind the fret wire (not on top of it). Your finger should be curved, not flat.

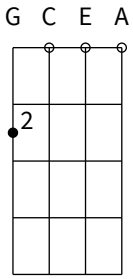
Exercise 2.1: C Chord Practice

1. Form the C chord and strum all four strings slowly downward
2. Listen—all notes should ring clearly with no buzzing
3. If any string sounds muted or buzzy, adjust your finger position
4. Repeat 20 times, checking for clean sound each time

A Minor

The Am chord has a melancholic, reflective sound.

Am



Fingering:

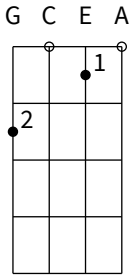
- Place your middle finger (2) on the 2nd fret of the G string (top string)
- The other three strings are played open

Key Concept: Major chords generally sound "happy" or "bright," while minor chords sound "sad" or "dark." Compare C major and A minor to hear the difference.

F Major

The F chord requires two fingers. F has a warm, full sound—slightly darker than C.

F



Fingering:

- Index finger (1) on the 1st fret of the E string
- Middle finger (2) on the 2nd fret of the G string

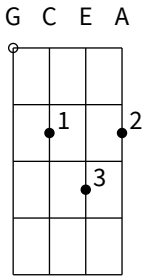
Exercise 2.2: F Chord Practice

Practice forming the F chord, then releasing completely. Repeat 15 times, focusing on placing both fingers simultaneously rather than one at a time.

G Major

The G chord uses three fingers and can be challenging for beginners. G sounds bright and resonant on ukulele, with a strong, confident character.

G



Fingering:

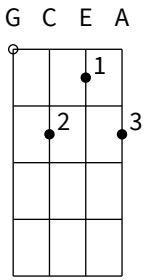
- Index finger (1) on the 2nd fret of the C string
- Ring finger (3) on the 3rd fret of the E string
- Middle finger (2) on the 2nd fret of the A string

Tip: The G chord shape may feel awkward at first. Keep your fingers curved and close to the frets. With practice, this shape will become comfortable.

G Seventh

The G7 chord is often easier than G major and serves a similar function in many songs. G7 adds a bluesy tension that wants to resolve back to C—you can almost hear it pulling toward home.

G7



Fingering:

- Index finger (1) on the 1st fret of the E string
- Middle finger (2) on the 2nd fret of the C string
- Ring finger (3) on the 2nd fret of the A string

2.2 Chord Switching

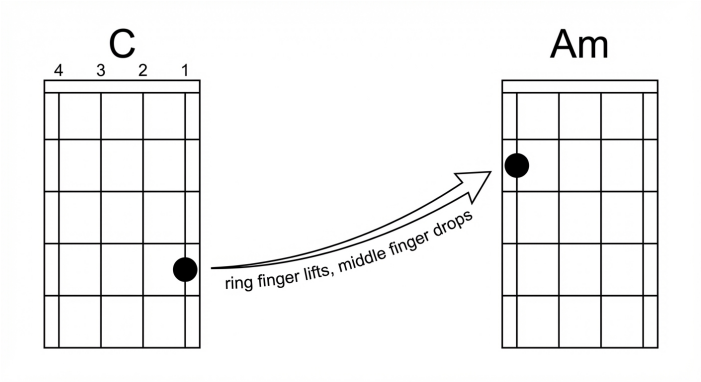
Being able to switch between chords smoothly is essential for playing songs. Here are key principles:

1. **Look for common fingers**: Some chord transitions share finger positions
2. **Move together**: Try to move all fingers simultaneously, not one at a time
3. **Prepare ahead**: Start moving to the next chord before you need it
4. **Stay relaxed**: Tension slows you down

Practice Transitions

Practice these common chord changes:

Transition	Tip
C → Am	Ring finger lifts, middle finger drops
Am → F	Middle finger stays, add index finger
C → F	Lift ring finger, form F shape
F → G7	Index finger stays on the 1st fret of the E string; move middle finger to the C string and add ring finger
C → G7	Complete shape change—practice slowly



Finger movement when switching from C to Am.

Exercise 2.3: One-Minute Changes

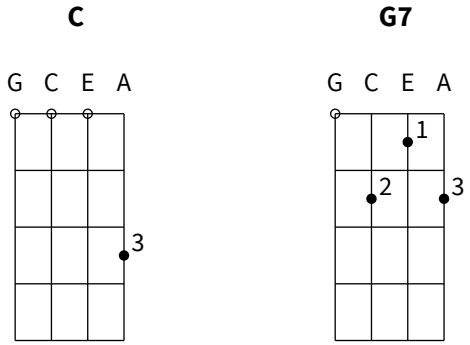
Set a timer for one minute. Switch between two chords as many times as possible while maintaining clean sound. Track your count daily—you should see improvement over a week.

Goal: 30+ clean changes per minute for each transition.

2.3 Your First Song: Row, Row, Row Your Boat

This simple melody uses only two chords: C and G7.

Chords needed:



Lyrics and chords:

[C] Row, row, row your boat,
Gently down the stream,
[G7] Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
[C] Life is but a dream.

Tip: Strum once per chord change at first. As you get comfortable, try strumming a steady downstroke on each beat.

2.4 Common Chord Progressions

Many songs use the same Chord Progression patterns. Here are two essential progressions using your new chords:

The "50s Progression"

C – Am – F – G (or G7)

This progression appears in countless songs, including "Stand By Me."

Exercise 2.4: 50s Progression Practice

Play through C – Am – F – G7 with one strum per chord. Repeat until the changes feel smooth, then try two strums per chord.

The I-IV-V Progression

C – F – G (or G7) – C

This is the foundation of rock, blues, folk, and country music.

Chords that sound good together, like these, are often called a chord family—you will meet more of them in Chapter 4.

2.5 Summary

You've learned five essential chords: C, Am, F, G, and G7. These chords, combined with smooth transitions, will enable you to play many songs. Practice the switching exercises daily and try playing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" until it feels natural.

Practice Routine:

1. Practice forming each chord 20 times (total: 100 chord formations)
2. Do one-minute changes for: C-Am, Am-F, C-F, F-G7, C-G7
3. Play "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" at least 5 times through
4. Try the 50s progression with one strum per chord

Chapter 3

Essential Strumming

In this chapter, you will learn:

- Understand basic rhythm concepts: beats, measures, and time signatures
- Master the basic downstrum technique
- Learn essential strumming patterns for common time signatures
- Control dynamics (loud and soft playing)
- Keep steady time while playing

3.1 Rhythm Fundamentals

Before learning Strumming patterns, you need to understand basic rhythm concepts.

Beats and Tempo

A Beat is the basic unit of time in music—the pulse you tap your foot to. Tempo is how fast or slow the beats occur, measured in BPM (beats per minute). A typical pop song might be 100–120 BPM.

Measures and Time Signatures

Beats are grouped into Measure (Bar)s (also called bars). The Time Signature tells you how many beats are in each measure:

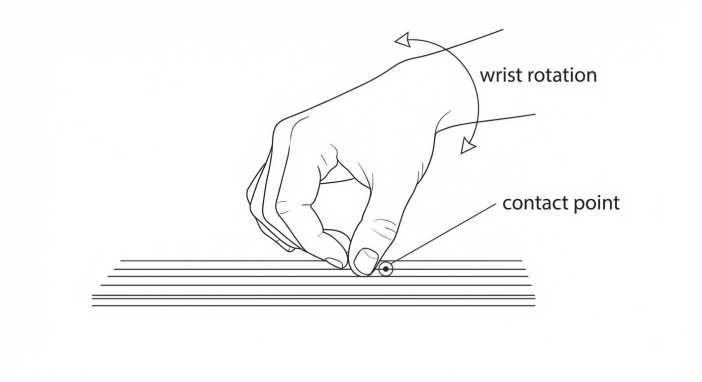
- **4/4 time** ("common time"): 4 beats per measure—the most common in popular music
- **3/4 time** ("waltz time"): 3 beats per measure—used in waltzes and some ballads
- **6/8 time**: six eighth notes grouped into two main beats—creates a "rolling" feel

3.2 Basic Strumming Technique

Right Hand Position

Position your strumming hand as follows:

1. Relax your hand completely—tension is the enemy of good strumming
2. Use your index finger, loosely curled, or hold a felt pick lightly
3. Strum across all four strings in a smooth motion
4. The motion comes from your wrist, not your elbow or shoulder
5. Your wrist should rotate slightly, like turning a doorknob



Right hand strumming position showing wrist rotation and contact point.

Downstrums

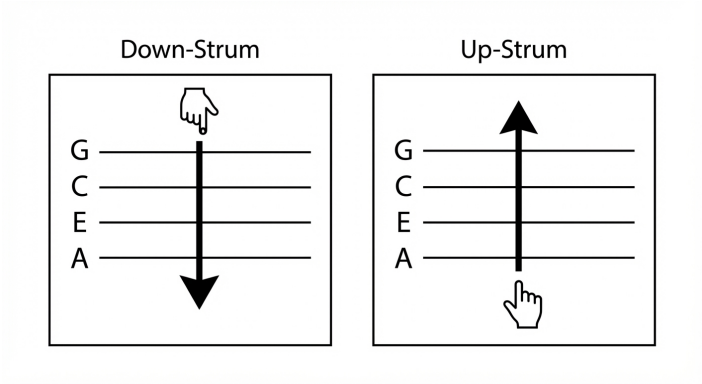
The Downstrum (↓) moves from the G string (top) toward the A string (bottom). This is the foundation of all strumming.

Exercise 3.1: Downstrum Practice

1. Hold the C chord
2. Strum down across all strings with your index finger
3. Count aloud: "1, 2, 3, 4" with one strum per count
4. Keep the tempo steady (use a Metronome set to 60 BPM)
5. Practice for 2 minutes without stopping

Upstrums

The Upstrum (↑) moves from A string toward G string. Upstrums are typically lighter and quicker than downstrums.



Downstrum and upstrum directions across the strings.

Tip: On upstrums, you don't need to hit all four strings. Catching just the bottom two or three strings is fine and often sounds better.

Exercise 3.2: Upstrum Practice

1. Hold the C chord
2. Strum *up* across the strings with a light, quick motion
3. Alternate down and up: ↓↑↓↑
4. Count "1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &" with downs on the numbers and ups on the "&"
5. Use a metronome at 60 BPM. Practice for 2 minutes.

Focus on keeping the upstrums lighter than the downstrums—this contrast gives your strumming a natural, musical feel.

3.3 Essential Strumming Patterns

Pattern 1: Four Downstrums

The simplest pattern—one downstrum per beat:

↓	↓	↓	↓
1	2	3	4

Use this pattern when learning new songs or chord progressions.

Pattern 2: Down-Down-Up

A common folk and pop pattern:

↓		↓	↑	↓		↓	↑
1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&

Down on 1; down-up on 2 and its "&"; repeat on beats 3 and 4. The "&" represents the upbeat of a beat.

Pattern 3: Island Strum

The classic ukulele pattern, also called the "calypso strum":

↓		↓	↑	x	↑	↓	↑
1	&	2	&	(3)	&	4	&

On the empty "&" after beat 1, keep your hand moving up without touching the strings—the strumming motion never stops. The x indicates a "chunk" or muted strum (see below). The parentheses around "(3)" mark the beat where the chunk falls: the count keeps going, but no open chord rings. A simpler variant misses beat 3 entirely: the strumming hand keeps moving through the downstroke without touching the strings, and the "&" after it is played as an ordinary upstrum. The chunk is the more percussive option once that feels comfortable.

Exercise 3.3: Island Strum Practice

1. Start slowly, counting aloud
2. Practice on a single chord (C) until comfortable
3. Gradually increase tempo
4. Apply to a simple chord progression (C – G7)

Pattern 4: Waltz Pattern (3/4)

For songs in 3/4 time:

↓ ↓ ↓
1 2 3

Often the first beat is emphasized: ↓↓↓
A more flowing variation adds an upstrum: ↓↓↑↓

Exercise 3.4: Waltz Practice

Play the waltz pattern on a C–F–G7–C progression. Each chord gets one measure (3 beats). Emphasize beat 1 of each measure. Try "Amazing Grace" or "Down in the Valley" with this pattern.

3.4 The Chunk (Muted Strum)

The "Chunk" is a percussive muted sound that adds rhythm and groove to your playing. There are two ways to produce it:

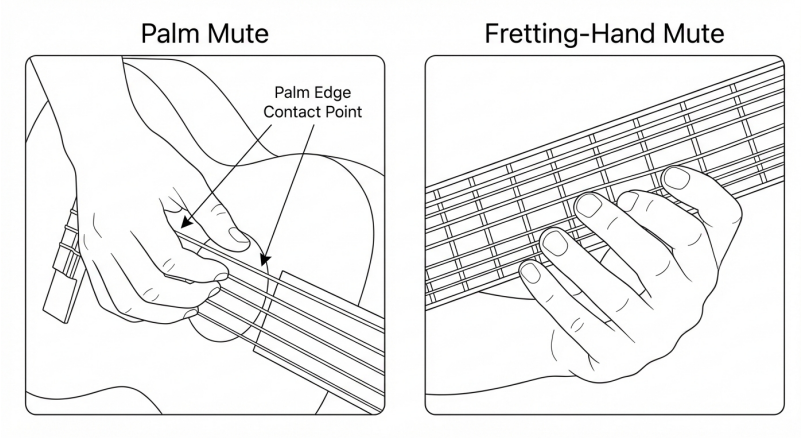
Strumming-hand palm mute (standard for the Island Strum):

1. Immediately after strumming down, let the fleshy edge of your strumming-hand palm land on the strings near the bridge
2. The strings are muted by your palm, producing a short, percussive "chk"
3. The strum and mute happen in one fluid motion

Fretting-hand mute (useful for full stops):

1. Relax your fretting hand to mute the strings (without lifting completely)
2. Simultaneously strum down
3. The result is a dead, percussive sound with no ringing notes

Both techniques are valuable. The palm mute lets the chord ring briefly before cutting off, while the fretting-hand mute produces a completely dry sound.



Palm mute (left) and fretting-hand mute (right) techniques.

Exercise 3.5: Chunk Practice

Alternate between a C chord and a chunk:

Chord - Chunk - Chord - Chunk
↓ x ↓ x
1 2 3 4

Count: "1, 2, 3, 4" with chords on 1 and 3, chunks on 2 and 4.

3.5 Dynamics

Dynamics refers to how loud or soft you play. Varying dynamics makes your playing more expressive and musical.

Piano (p): Soft—strum gently with less hand movement

Forte (f): Loud—strum with more energy and follow-through

Crescendo: Gradually getting louder

Decrescendo: Gradually getting softer

Tip: Many beginners play at one constant volume. Practice a song playing verse sections softly and chorus sections louder to add musical interest.

Exercise 3.6: Dynamics Practice

Using the island strum on a C chord:

1. Play 4 measures softly (piano)
2. Gradually get louder over the next 4 measures (crescendo)
3. Play 4 measures loudly (forte)
4. Gradually get softer over the next 4 measures (decrescendo)

Repeat this 16-measure cycle. The volume change should come from how much energy you put into the strum, not from tensing your hand.

3.6 Keeping Time

Steady timing is crucial. Here's how to develop it:

1. **Use a metronome**: Start slow (60 BPM) and gradually increase
2. **Count aloud**: "1, 2, 3, 4" or "1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and"
3. **Tap your foot**: Physical motion helps internalize the beat
4. **Play along with recordings**: Match the groove of recorded songs

Exercise 3.7: Metronome Practice

1. Set a metronome to 70 BPM
2. Play the island strum pattern through the C-Am-F-G7 progression
3. Each chord gets one full measure (4 beats)
4. Continue for 3 minutes without stopping
5. If you lose the beat, slow down and start again

3.7 Summary

Strumming is the rhythmic engine of your ukulele playing. Master the basic patterns in this chapter, focusing on keeping steady time and relaxed technique. The island strum pattern is particularly use-

ful and will serve you well across many songs. For a quick-reference library of strumming patterns, see Appendix B.

Practice Routine:

1. Practice downstrums on beats with a metronome (5 minutes)
2. Work on the island strum pattern until it's automatic (10 minutes)
3. Practice adding chunks to your strumming
4. Play through C-Am-F-G7 with different strumming patterns

Chapter 4

Building Your Chord Vocabulary

In this chapter, you will learn:

- Learn chords from the D, E, and A chord families
- Understand major and minor chord relationships
- Expand to 15 commonly used chords
- Apply new chords to songs

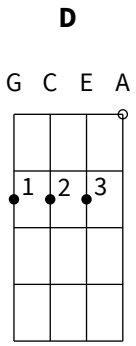
4.1 Beyond the First Five

In Chapter 2, you learned C, Am, F, G, and G7. Now we'll expand your chord vocabulary with more essential shapes.

4.2 The D Family

D Major

The D chord uses three fingers in a compact shape:



Fingering:

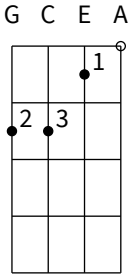
- Index finger (1) on 2nd fret of G string
- Middle finger (2) on 2nd fret of C string
- Ring finger (3) on 2nd fret of E string
- A string is played open

Tip: Stack your fingers vertically on the same fret. Keep them close together and curved.

D Minor

The Dm chord has a sad, contemplative quality:

Dm



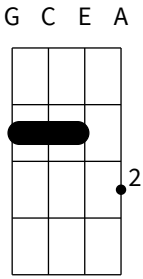
Fingering:

- Index finger (1) on 1st fret of E string
- Middle finger (2) on 2nd fret of G string
- Ring finger (3) on 2nd fret of C string

D Seventh

The D7 chord adds tension that resolves nicely to G:

D7



Fingering:

- Index finger (1) lies flat across the G, C, and E strings at the 2nd fret, a small barre (Chapter 5 covers barres in depth)
- Middle finger (2) on 3rd fret of A string

Exercise 4.1: D Family Practice

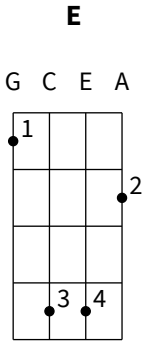
Practice switching between D, Dm, and D7. Notice how similar the shapes are—use this to your advantage when switching.

4.3 The E Family

E chords can be challenging on ukulele but are essential for many songs. E major has a bright, piercing quality worth the effort—it cuts through clearly and adds energy to any progression.

E Major

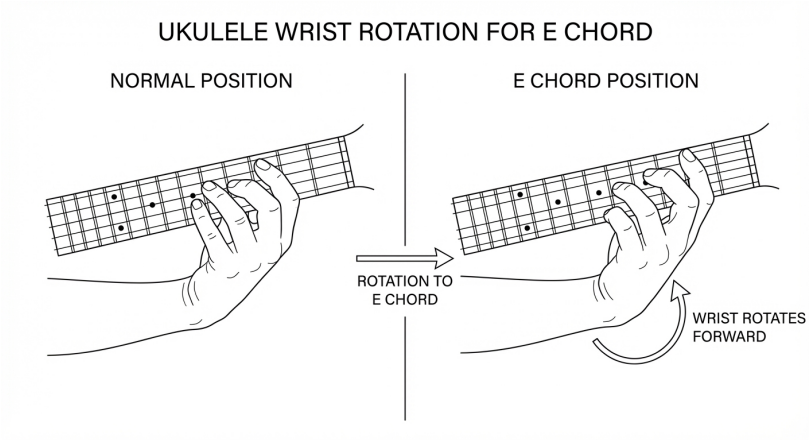
The E chord requires four fingers:



Fingering:

- Index finger (1) on 1st fret of G string
- Middle finger (2) on 2nd fret of A string
- Ring finger (3) on 4th fret of C string
- Pinky (4) on 4th fret of E string

Tip: This is one of the harder chord shapes. Practice forming it slowly and build up speed gradually.

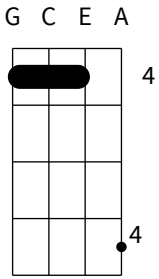


Wrist rotation needed for the E chord shape.

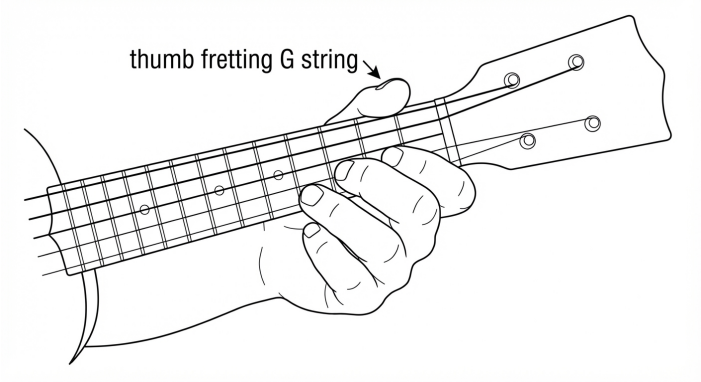
Alternative E Voicing

If the standard E shape is too difficult, try this easier voicing:

E (4447)



This 4447 version uses a barre at the 4th fret across the G, C, and E strings with your pinky on the 7th fret of the A string (shown as fret 4 in the diagram, which starts at position 4). Some players prefer the thumb version: wrap your thumb over the top of the neck to fret the G string at the 1st fret (G♯), so your remaining three fingers only handle the other notes.

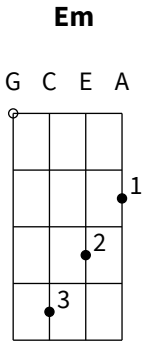


Thumb-around technique: the thumb wraps over the neck to fret the G string.

Wrist Position for E: Rotate your wrist forward (toward the headstock) when forming E. This brings your fingers perpendicular to the fretboard and makes reaching the 4th fret easier while maintaining the 1st fret note.

E Minor

The Em chord is easier than E major:



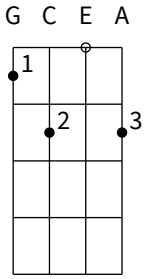
Fingering:

- Index finger (1) on 2nd fret of A string
- Middle finger (2) on 3rd fret of E string
- Ring finger (3) on 4th fret of C string
- G string is played open

E Seventh

The E7 chord adds a bluesy tension to the E family and resolves naturally to A:

E7



Fingering:

- Index finger (1) on 1st fret of G string
- Middle finger (2) on 2nd fret of C string
- Ring finger (3) on 2nd fret of A string
- E string is played open

Exercise 4.2: E Family Transitions

The E family is challenging but essential. Practice these specific transitions:

1. **E to Em (anchor finger):** Your ring finger stays on the C string (4th fret). Focus on lifting and replacing the other fingers as a unit.
2. **A to E:** Your index and middle fingers keep their frets in both chords—fret 1 and fret 2—though on different strings; it is the ring and pinky reaching up to fret 4 that makes E feel bigger. Visualize the E shape before lifting from A.
3. **E to A7:** A common progression. Practice the "release and reform" motion—lift all fingers, pause, then place the A7 shape.
4. **Am to E:** This tests your stretch. Keep your index finger near fret 1 while extending ring and pinky up to fret 4—let the hand ride slightly up the neck rather than pulling back toward the nut.

One-Minute Change Goals:

- Week 1: 15 clean changes per minute
- Week 2: 20 clean changes per minute

- Week 3: 25+ clean changes per minute

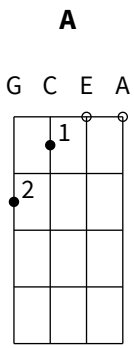
Practice each transition separately before combining them in songs.

E Major Finger Independence: The E chord requires fingers on frets 1, 2, and 4 simultaneously. Practice placing fingers 3 and 4 (ring and pinky) together on fret 4 first, then add the index and middle fingers. This "outside-in" approach builds the stretch gradually.

4.4 The A Family

A Major

The A chord is a two-finger shape:



Fingering:

- Index finger (1) on 1st fret of C string
- Middle finger (2) on 2nd fret of G string

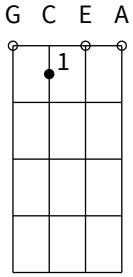
A Minor (Review)

You already know Am from Chapter 2. It pairs naturally with A major.

A Seventh

The A7 chord is simple—just one finger:

A7



Fingering:

- Index finger on 1st fret of C string
- All other strings open

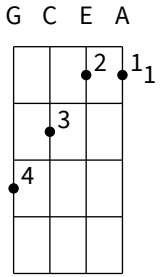
4.5 More Common Chords

Some chords don't fit neatly into the families above but appear frequently in songs. Here are two more essential shapes:

B Flat Major

B♭ is typically played as a barre chord (covered in Chapter 5), but here's a simplified version:

B♭

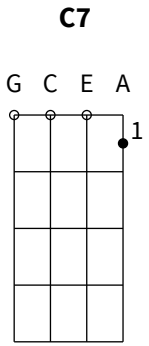


Fingering:

- Index finger (1) on 1st fret of A string
- Middle finger (2) on 1st fret of E string
- Ring finger (3) on 2nd fret of C string
- Pinky (4) on 3rd fret of G string

C Seventh

C7 adds a bluesy edge to the basic C chord:



C7 uses just one finger—your index finger on the 1st fret of the A string, instead of the ring finger on the 3rd fret used for C major.

4.6 Major and Minor Relationships

Every major chord has a **relative minor**—a minor chord from the same key, built on the same pool of notes. The two chords share two of their three notes (C and Am both contain C and E), which is why they sound like close cousins:

Major	Relative Minor
C	Am
F	Dm
G	Em
D	Bm
A	F#m

You can often substitute a chord's relative minor (or vice versa) to create a different feel while staying in the same key. (You can play the Am, Dm, and Em partners right now; Bm is waiting for you in the next chapter.)

4.7 Chord Summary Chart

Here's a quick reference for all chords learned so far:

Chord	Type	Difficulty
C	Major	Easy
Am	Minor	Easy
F	Major	Easy
G	Major	Medium
G7	Dominant 7th	Medium
C7	Dominant 7th	Easy
D	Major	Easy
Dm	Minor	Easy
D7	Dominant 7th	Easy
E	Major	Hard
Em	Minor	Medium
E7	Dominant 7th	Easy
A	Major	Easy
A7	Dominant 7th	Easy
B♭	Major	Hard

The seventh chords here are "dominant" sevenths—the type that pulls toward the next chord, as you heard with G7; Chapter 6 explains why.

Exercise 4.3: Chord Review

Play through all 15 chords in order, spending 4 beats on each. Use a metronome at 60 BPM. Repeat until you can play through without hesitation.

4.8 Summary

You've significantly expanded your chord vocabulary to include chords from the D, E, and A families. With these 15 chords, you can play songs in most common keys. For a complete chord reference, see Appendix A. Continue practicing chord switches and apply these chords to the songs in Part IV.

Practice Routine:

1. Form each new chord 15 times, checking for clean sound
2. Practice one-minute changes: D-Dm, A-Am, E-Em, A-E, Am-E
3. Play through all 15 chords with a metronome
4. Try playing "Twist and Shout" (D-G-A) or "La Bamba" (C-F-G)

☆ Milestone: What You Can Do Now

By completing this part, you have achieved the following skills:

- Play 15 essential chords fluently (C, Am, F, G, G7, C7, D, Dm, D7, E, Em, E7, A, A7, B♭)
- Switch smoothly between chords without long pauses
- Understand the difference between major and minor chords
- Play simple 3–4 chord songs with confidence
- Use a metronome to maintain steady rhythm while changing chords

Part II

Developing Skills

Chapter 5

Barre Chords

In this chapter, you will learn:

- Understand what barre chords are and why they're useful
- Master the barre technique with your index finger
- Learn moveable major, minor, and seventh shapes
- Play in any key using barre chord positions

Before You Begin: Barre chords build on the open chord shapes from Chapters 2 and 4. Make sure you can switch comfortably between open chords before tackling barres.

5.1 What Are Barre Chords?

A Barre Chord (also spelled "bar chord") is formed by pressing your index finger across multiple strings while other fingers form a chord shape. The index finger acts like a moveable nut or Capo.

Barre chords have two major advantages:

1. **Moveable shapes**: One shape can play any chord by moving up or down the neck
2. **Complete coverage**: Access chords that are difficult or impossible with open shapes

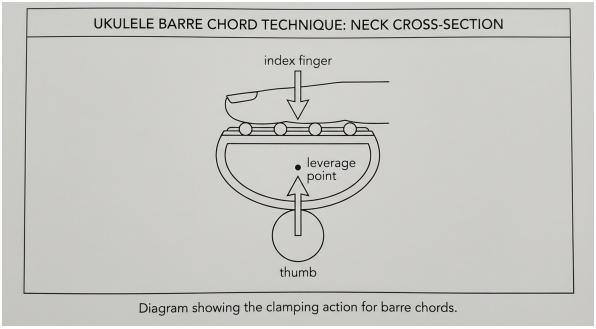
5.2 The Barre Technique

Forming the Barre

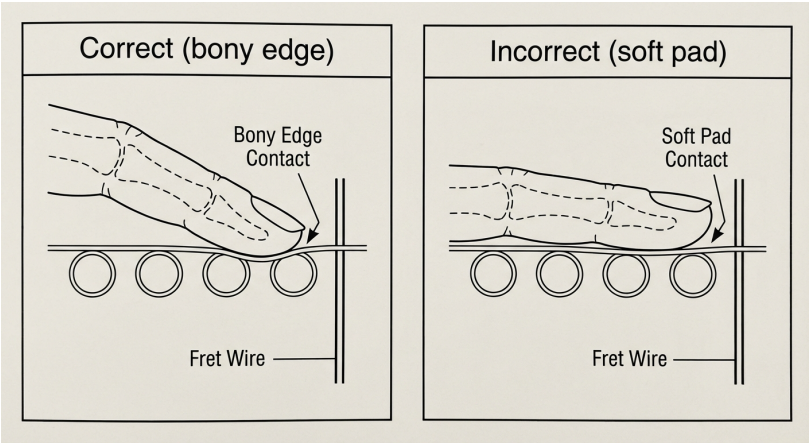
Position your index finger:

1. Lay your index finger flat across all four strings
2. Press down using the bony side of your finger (closer to your thumb side)
3. Keep your finger straight—don't curve it
4. Position just behind the fret wire, not on top of it
5. Apply pressure by squeezing between your thumb (on the back of the neck) and index finger

Tip: The key to barre chords is using leverage, not brute strength. Think of your thumb and index finger as two sides of a clamp.



Cross-section showing thumb and index finger leverage for barre chords.



Use the bony edge of the finger (left), not the soft pad (right).

Common Problems and Solutions

Muted strings: Press harder or roll your finger slightly toward the bony edge

Finger pain: Build up gradually; take breaks; it gets easier with calluses

Buzzing notes: Move closer to (but not on) the fret wire

Hand fatigue: Relax between chords; don't death-grip the neck

Progressive Barre Conditioning

Building barre chord strength takes time. Use this graduated approach over 2–3 weeks:

Stage 1: Two-String Barre (Days 1–5)

Start with a partial barre across just two strings:

1. Place your index finger flat across the E and A strings at the 5th fret
2. Press firmly and strum just those two strings
3. Both notes should ring clearly without buzzing
4. Hold for 10 seconds, release, repeat 5 times
5. Move to frets 3, 7, and 2 for variety

Tip: Use the side of your finger (toward the thumb) rather than the soft pad. This bony edge provides more pressure with less effort.

Stage 2: Three-String Barre (Days 6–10)

Extend to three strings:

1. Barre across C, E, and A strings at the 5th fret
2. Check each string individually for clear tone
3. Hold for 10 seconds, repeat 5 times
4. Practice at different fret positions

Stage 3: Full Four-String Barre (Days 11–15)

Now attempt the complete barre:

1. Lay your index finger across all four strings at the 5th fret
2. Rotate your finger slightly so the harder edge contacts the strings
3. Position your thumb directly behind your index finger on the back of the neck

4. Strum and check that all four notes ring cleanly
5. Hold for 15 seconds, release, repeat 5 times

Exercise 5.1: Barre Endurance Builder

Once you can hold a clean four-string barre:

1. Start at fret 5 (easiest—strings have more give)
2. Hold for 30 seconds while strumming a slow rhythm
3. Move to fret 3 (harder—the strings give less near the nut)
4. Work down to fret 1 (hardest) over several sessions

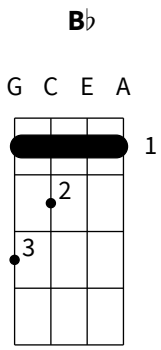
Track your progress: Note which frets you can play cleanly and for how long.

Key Concept: Barre chords challenge every beginner—but patience pays off. Most players need a few weeks of daily practice before barres feel comfortable. Short, frequent practice sessions (5 minutes, 3 times daily) work better than one long session.

5.3 The Major Barre Shape

The most common barre chord shape is based on the A major chord moved up the neck.

B♭ Major (First Fret)



The number to the right of the diagram is the position number—the fret the diagram starts from—not a finger number. Here it reads 1: the barre sits at the 1st fret.

Fingering:

- Index finger (1) barres all strings at the 1st fret
- Middle finger (2) on 2nd fret of the C string
- Ring finger (3) on 3rd fret of the G string

Moving the Shape

This same shape creates different chords at different frets:

Fret	Chord
1st	B♭
2nd	B
3rd	C
4th	C♯/D♭
5th	D
6th	D♯/E♭
7th	E

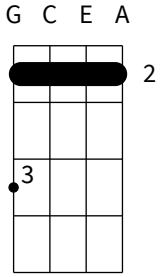
Why Fret 1 = B♭: The fret number in the table refers to where your barre (index finger) sits. The chord's root note is on the G string, two frets above the barre—because the underlying open A-shape has its root at the 2nd fret of the G string. So a barre at fret 1 puts the root at fret 3, which is B♭ on the G string.

Key Concept: Learn one barre shape and you've essentially learned 12 chords—one for every note!

5.4 The Minor Barre Shape

The minor barre shape is based on Am:

Bm



Fingering:

- Index finger barres all strings
- Ring finger (3) on the G string, two frets above the barre.

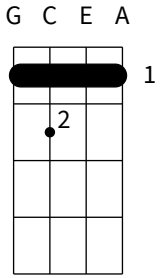
Moving this shape:

Barre Fret	Chord
1st	B♭m
2nd	Bm
3rd	Cm
4th	C♯m/D♭m
5th	Dm

5.5 Seventh Barre Shapes

Dominant Seventh

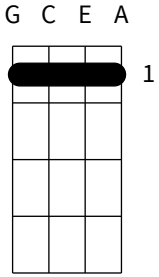
B♭7



This is the dominant seventh—the plain "7" chord; Chapter 6 covers it in depth.

Minor Seventh

B♭m7



The minor seventh barre uses a full barre with no additional fingers—the barre alone creates the chord.

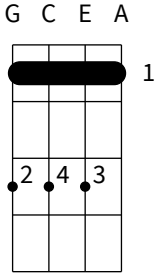
5.6 A Second Moveable Shape

The major and minor barre shapes above are rooted on the G string: the open A shape's root sits at the 2nd fret of the G string, two frets above the barre. The seventh shapes are rooted on the A string, at the barre fret itself—so C7, for example, is the B♭7 shape barred at fret 3. A second family of moveable chords is rooted on the C string, based on the open D major chord (2220 — the four digits are the fretted fret of the G, C, E, and A strings; 0 means open) shifted up the neck.

The Shape

Move the open D shape up one fret and barre behind it:

E♭



Fingering:

- Index finger (1) barres all strings at the 1st fret
- Middle finger (2) on the 3rd fret, G string
- Ring finger (3) on the 3rd fret, E string
- Pinky (4) on the 3rd fret, C string

The root of this chord is on the C string, fretted two frets above the barre. With the barre at the 1st fret, that note is E♭, so this is an E♭ major chord (3331).

Moving the Shape

Fret	Chord
1st	E♭
2nd	E
3rd	F
5th	G
7th	A
8th	B♭
10th	C

Tip: Use whichever shape keeps your hand closer to its current position. If you are playing near the 5th fret, the C-string shape may reach a chord more easily than jumping to a G-string shape at the 1st fret.

Key Concept: The minor version of the C-string barre shape (e.g., 3321, as in the E♭m shape in Appendix A) requires an awkward stretch and is impractical on ukulele. Stick to the G-string shape for minor barre chords.

Exercise 5.2: Shape Comparison

Play a I–IV–V progression in the key of B♭ (B♭–E♭–F) using barre chords. Try it two ways:

1. Using only the G-string (A-shape) barre: B♭ at fret 1, E♭ at fret 6, F at fret 8
2. Mixing both shapes: B♭ at fret 1 (G-string shape), E♭ at fret 1 (C-string shape), F at fret 3 (C-string shape)

Notice how mixing shapes keeps your hand in one area of the neck.

5.7 Practice Strategies

Building Endurance

Barre chords require hand strength that develops over time:

1. Start with short practice sessions (5 minutes of barre work)
2. Practice higher on the neck first (frets are closer together, requiring less stretch)
3. Alternate between barre and open chords to give your hand rest
4. Be patient—comfort comes with consistent daily practice

Exercise 5.3: Barre Chord Circuit

Play through this sequence, holding each chord for 4 beats:
B♭ (1st fret) → C (3rd fret) → D (5th fret) → E (7th fret)
Then reverse direction. Repeat 4 times.

Mixing Barre and Open Chords

Many songs use a combination:

C (open) → F (open) → B♭ (barre) → G (open)

Practice transitioning smoothly between the two types.

5.8 When to Use Barre Chords

Use barre chords when:

- The chord has no easy open shape (B, B♭, F♯, etc.)
- You want a consistent tone quality across a progression
- You're playing jazz or need to change chords quickly in complex progressions
- You want to play the same song in a different key

5.9 Summary

Barre chords unlock the entire fretboard, allowing you to play any chord in any position. While challenging at first, consistent practice will build the hand strength and technique needed. Start with the major shape and gradually add minor and seventh variations.

Practice Routine:

1. Practice the barre conditioning exercise at 3 different fret positions
2. Form B♭, C, and D using the barre shape (1st, 3rd, 5th frets)
3. Practice switching between an open G and a barre B♭
4. Play a song you know, replacing open chords with their barre equivalents
5. Play the same chord (e.g., G) using both the G-string and C-string barre shapes and compare the sound

Chapter 6

Seventh Chords and Beyond

In this chapter, you will learn:

- Understand intervals and how chords are built from scales
- Learn the theory behind seventh chords
- Master major seventh, minor seventh, and dominant seventh shapes
- Explore diminished, augmented, and suspended chords
- Add color and sophistication to your playing

6.1 How Chords Are Built

Before diving into seventh chords, it helps to understand how *all* chords are constructed. This foundation will make every chord in this chapter—and beyond—make intuitive sense.

The Chromatic Scale

Western music uses 12 notes, repeating in higher and lower Octaves:

A – A♯/B♭ – B – C – C♯/D♭ – D – D♯/E♭ – E – F – F♯/G♭ – G – G♯/A♭

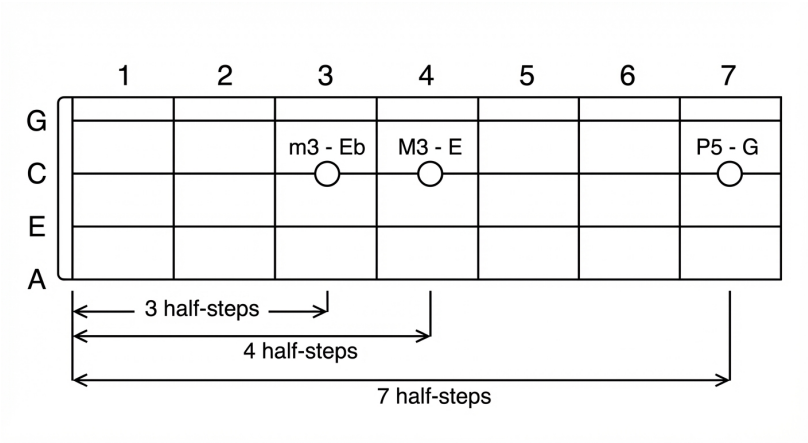
Each step between adjacent notes is a Half Step (one fret on ukulele). Two half steps make a Whole Step.

Intervals

An Interval is the distance between two notes. Intervals are the building blocks of both melodies and chords:

Interval	Half Steps	Example from C
Minor 3rd	3	C to E♭
Major 3rd	4	C to E
Perfect 5th	7	C to G
Minor 7th	10	C to B♭
Major 7th	11	C to B

You don't need to memorize every interval right now—the key ones for chord building are thirds, fifths, and sevenths.



Common intervals shown on the ukulele fretboard.

Triads: Three-Note Chords

Nearly every chord you have played so far is a Triad—three notes built by stacking intervals of a third. You have already played some seventh chords (G7 back in Chapter 2, the barre shapes in Chapter 5) without exploring what makes them tick; this chapter fills that gap:

Major triad: Root + Major 3rd + Perfect 5th (e.g., C–E–G)

Minor triad: Root + Minor 3rd + Perfect 5th (e.g., A–C–E)

Diminished triad: Root + Minor 3rd + Diminished 5th (e.g., B–D–F)

Augmented triad: Root + Major 3rd + Augmented 5th (e.g., C–E–G♯)

Key Concept: A major chord sounds bright because its third is a major 3rd (4 half steps). A minor chord sounds darker because its third is a minor 3rd (3 half steps). That single half-step difference creates the entire emotional shift between major and minor.

6.2 What Are Seventh Chords?

A **seventh chord** adds a fourth note to the basic three-note triad. By stacking one more third on top of the fifth, you reach the seventh scale degree. This extra note creates richer, more complex harmonies. There are several types, depending on whether the triad and the seventh are major, minor, or diminished:

Major 7th (maj7): Major triad + Major 7th (11 half steps from root)

Dominant 7th (7): Major triad + Minor 7th (10 half steps from root)

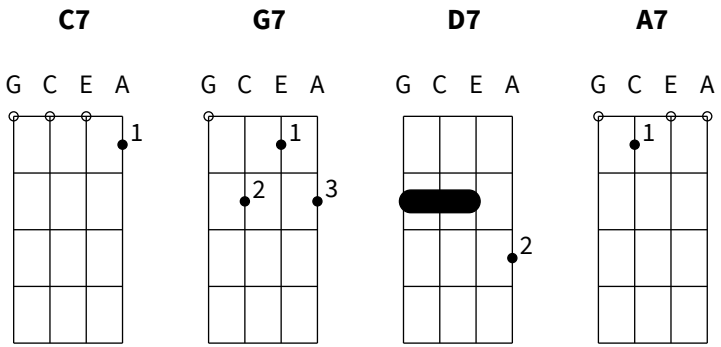
Minor 7th (m7): Minor triad + Minor 7th (10 half steps from root)

Diminished 7th (dim7): Diminished triad + Diminished 7th (9 half steps from root)

6.3 Dominant Seventh Chords

The Dominant Seventh (7) (written simply as "7") has a bluesy, unresolved sound that wants to move to another chord.

Common Dominant Sevenths



Tip: Dominant sevenths often appear as the "V" chord in a progression, leading strongly back to the "I" (home) chord. G7 → C is a classic example.

Exercise 6.1: Dominant Seventh Progressions

Play these progressions to hear how dominant sevenths create tension and resolution:

1. C → F → G7 → C

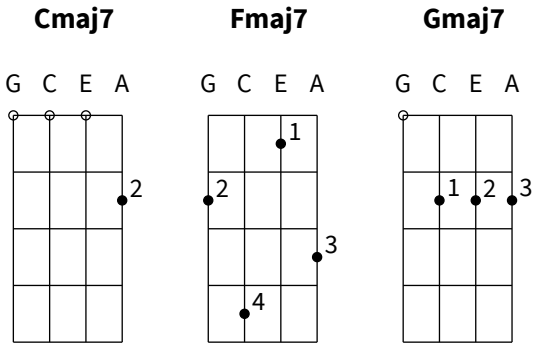
2. A → D → E7 → A

3. G → C → D7 → G

6.4 Major Seventh Chords

The Major Seventh (maj7) (written "maj7" or "M7") has a dreamy, sophisticated sound often used in jazz and bossa nova.

Common Major Sevenths



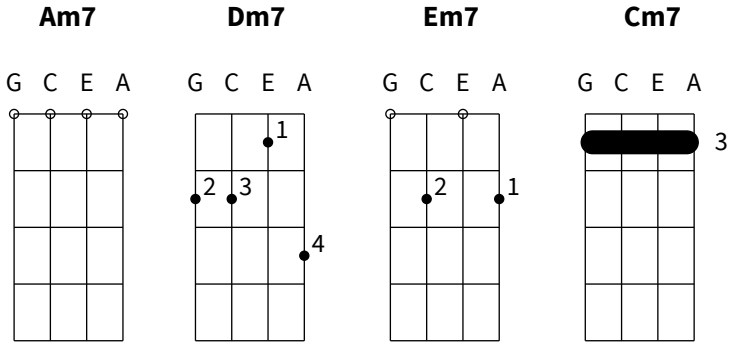
Fmaj7 uses one finger per fret, from the 1st fret to the 4th—a good stretch for your fretting hand.

Key Concept: Major seventh chords sound "resolved" and pleasant. Use them to add sophistication to simple progressions without creating tension.

6.5 Minor Seventh Chords

The Minor Seventh (m7) (written "m7") combines the melancholy of a minor chord with the richness of a seventh.

Common Minor Sevenths



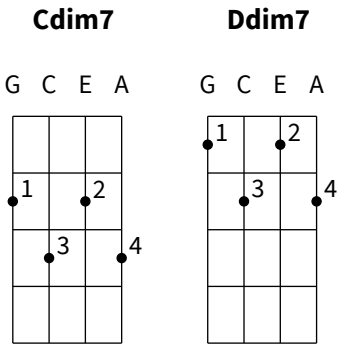
Am7 is the easiest chord on ukulele—all open strings!

Exercise 6.2: Jazz Progression

This classic "ii-V-I" jazz progression uses minor, dominant, and major sevenths:
Dm7 → G7 → Cmaj7
Play it slowly, listening to how each chord flows to the next.

6.6 Diminished Chords

Diminished chords have a tense, unstable sound. On ukulele, diminished chords are typically played as **fully diminished sevenths** (dim7)—four notes, each a minor third apart (e.g., C–E♭–G♭–B♭♭). A simple diminished *triad* (just three notes: root, ♭3, ♭5) is less common on ukulele because the fourth string naturally adds another minor third.



Players often use diminished chords as passing chords between two other chords:
C → C♯dim7 → Dm

Tip: Because a dim7 chord is built entirely from minor thirds, its shape repeats every three frets—slide the Cdim7 shape up three or six frets and it is still Cdim7.

And moving the shape by just one fret gives a new chord: one fret up from Cdim7 is C♯dim7 — exactly what the exercise below needs.

Exercise 6.3: Diminished Passing Chords

Play these progressions slowly, listening for the half-step "stepping stone" effect of the diminished chord:

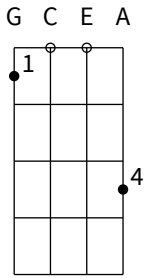
1. C → C♯dim7 → Dm
2. D → D♯dim7 → Em
3. Am → B♭dim7 → Bm

Notice how the diminished chord creates a smooth chromatic bridge between the two chords on either side.

6.7 Augmented Chords

Augmented chords (written "aug" or "+") have a magical, unresolved quality created by raising the fifth note.

Caug



To build any augmented chord, take the major shape and raise its fifth by one fret (G 0232 becomes Gaug 0332).

Augmented chords are often used to create movement:
C → Caug → F

The raised fifth creates a chromatic line that smoothly connects the chords.

Exercise 6.4: Augmented Chord Resolution

Play these progressions, listening for the raised 5th pulling toward the next chord:

1. C → Caug → F
2. G → Gaug → C
3. C → Caug → Am

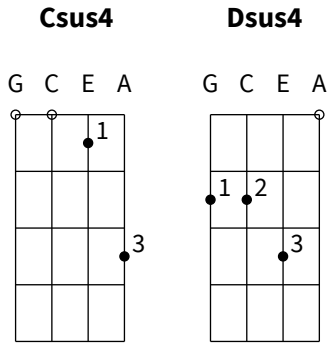
In each case the augmented 5th resolves upward by a half step to a note in the target chord—for example, G♯ in Caug moves to A, which is the root of Am or the third of F.

6.8 Suspended Chords

Suspended chords ("sus") replace the third with either the 2nd or 4th degree, creating an open, unresolved sound that wants to fall back to the regular major or minor chord.

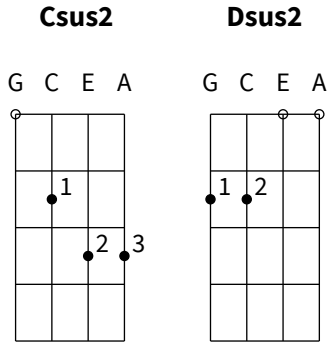
Sus4 Chords

A **sus4** replaces the 3rd with the 4th. It sounds expectant, like a question waiting for an answer:



Sus2 Chords

A **sus2** replaces the 3rd with the 2nd. It sounds airy and ambiguous—neither clearly major nor minor:



Try this common pattern: Dsus4 → D → Dsus2 → D. The suspension resolves inward from both directions, creating gentle movement within a single chord.

Exercise 6.5: Suspended Chord Resolutions

Practice these progressions to hear how suspensions create and release tension:

1. Dsus4 → D → Dsus2 → D (resolve from both sides)
2. Csus4 → C → Am (suspension resolving into the relative minor)

3. G → Csus4 → C → D → G (suspension within a full progression)

Notice how the sus4 creates anticipation and the resolution to the major chord provides a satisfying release.

6.9 Using These Chords Musically

Here's when to reach for these more colorful chords:

Dominant 7th: When you want tension before a resolution; blues and rock

Major 7th: For sophistication; jazz standards, bossa nova, mellow pop

Minor 7th: In jazz progressions; modern R&B and soul

Diminished: As passing chords; creating drama

Augmented: Brief moments of surprise; dreamlike transitions

Suspended: Creating movement within a chord; folk, pop, and rock intros

Exercise 6.6: Chord Comparison

Play these four chords in sequence, listening to their different qualities:
C → Cmaj7 → C7 → Cm7
Notice how each has a distinct emotional character despite sharing the same root note.

6.10 Summary

Seventh chords and color chords add depth and sophistication to your playing. Start by incorporating dominant sevenths into your existing songs, then explore major and minor sevenths. Diminished and augmented chords create movement and tension, while suspended chords add gentle motion within a single harmony.

Practice Routine:

1. Learn all four types of C seventh chord (C7, Cmaj7, Cm7, Cdim7)
2. Practice the ii-V-I progression: Dm7 → G7 → Cmaj7
3. Replace some major chords in songs you know with their maj7 versions
4. Experiment with a diminished passing chord between two familiar chords

Chapter 7

Advanced Strumming and Rhythm

In this chapter, you will learn:

- Master syncopation and offbeat accents
- Add percussive techniques to your strumming
- Play in compound time signatures (6/8, 12/8)
- Understand swing and shuffle feel
- Develop independence between strumming and chord changes

7.1 Syncopation

Syncopation occurs when you emphasize normally weak beats or play "between" the beats. This creates rhythmic tension and groove.

Offbeat Emphasis

In 4/4 time, beats 1 and 3 are normally strong, while 2 and 4 are weak. Try reversing this:

(↓)	↓	(↓)	↓
1	2	3	4

The accented strums on 2 and 4 create a reggae/ska feel. Parentheses indicate softer strums.

Anticipation

Playing a chord slightly *before* the beat creates anticipation:

↓		↓	↑	↓		↓	↑
1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&

The "&" of 2 anticipates beat 3, creating forward momentum. To feel it, hold your C chord through beat 2, then form the next chord as you play the upstrum on the "&" of 2—the new chord sounds a half beat before beat 3. That early arrival is the anticipation.

Exercise 7.1: Syncopation Practice

Play this syncopated pattern with a C chord. Use a metronome at 80 BPM:

↓		x	↑	↓		x	↑
1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&

The missing beats create a syncopated "push."

7.2 Percussive Techniques

Adding percussion transforms your ukulele into a rhythm instrument.

The Chunk (Review)

The Chunk creates a percussive "chk" sound by muting the strings while strumming. You learned this in Chapter 3.

The Tap

Tapping uses your strumming hand to hit the body of the ukulele:

1. Keep your fretting hand in chord position
2. Lightly tap the soundboard with your palm or fingers
3. The tap replaces a strum on a particular beat

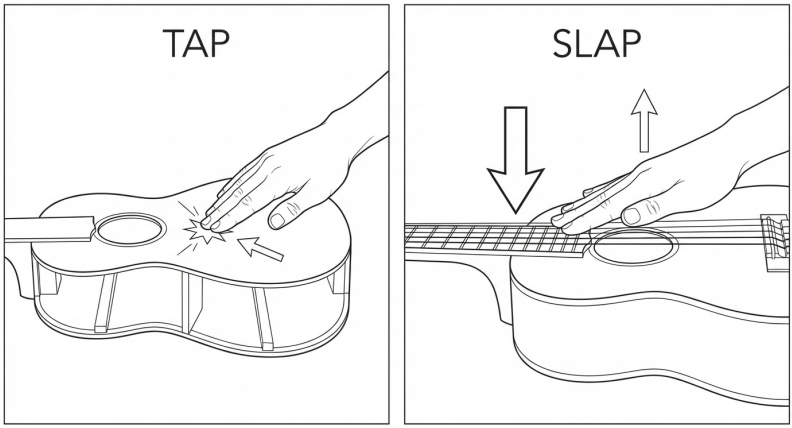
Tip: Tap gently—you want a subtle percussive sound, not a loud knock. Different parts of the body produce different tones.

The Slap

A more aggressive technique where you slap the strings against the fretboard:

1. With your strumming hand, quickly slap down on the strings over the sound hole

2. The strings hit the frets, creating a snare-like snap
3. Immediately release to let the chord ring



Tap (on the soundboard) and slap (on the strings) techniques.

Exercise 7.2: Rhythmic Percussion Pattern

Combine strumming, chunks, and taps:

↓		x		T	↑	↓	
1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&

This creates a full, rhythmic sound from just you and your ukulele.

7.3 Compound Time and Swing Feel

6/8 Time

In **6/8 time**, there are six eighth notes per measure, typically felt in two groups of three:

↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
1	2	3	4	5	6

This creates a "rolling" or "lilting" feel common in ballads, folk songs, and some rock songs.

12/8 Time

12/8 time is common in blues and slow rock. It's felt in four groups of three:

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Exercise 7.3: 6/8 Strumming

Play this 6/8 pattern on an Am chord. Accent beat 1 and beat 4:

↓ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↑
1 2 3 4 5 6

Set a metronome to 60 BPM (one click per dotted quarter note—two clicks per measure). Play through Am–G–F–E7, one measure each. This pattern suits songs like "Greensleeves."

Swing and Shuffle Feel

Swing feel is the rhythmic cousin of the compound time you just met: swung 4/4 subdivides each beat into triplets exactly as 12/8 does, which is why slow blues fits both. Even in 4/4 time, a **swing feel** (also called "shuffle" or "triplet feel") divides each beat into three parts instead of two, playing on the first and third parts. On paper it looks like straight eighth notes, but you play each pair as a triplet with the middle note removed:

Written:

↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

Played as:

↓ -- ↑ ↓ -- ↑ ↓ -- ↑ ↓ -- ↑
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

This creates a bouncy, "long-short" groove essential for blues, jazz, and swing music.

Exercise 7.4: Shuffle Strum

Play a simple blues shuffle over C7–F7–G7:

1. Set a metronome to 80 BPM
2. Strum the swing pattern: long ↓, short ↑ on each beat
3. Accent beats 2 and 4 for a bluesy feel

4. Play 4 bars of C7, 2 bars of F7, 2 bars of C7, 1 bar of G7, 1 bar of F7, 2 bars of C7 (a basic 12-bar blues)

Tip: For fingerpicking techniques—arpeggios, Travis picking, campanella, and more—see Chapter 10.

7.4 Independent Chord Changes

Advanced players change chords *independently* of their strumming pattern, meaning the strum continues unbroken while the fretting hand moves.

The Goal

Your strumming hand should be on "autopilot"—maintaining the rhythm regardless of what your fretting hand does.

Practice Method

1. Choose a simple strumming pattern
2. Play one chord until the pattern is completely automatic
3. While strumming, change to a new chord
4. Your strumming should not pause, slow down, or hesitate
5. If it does, practice each chord longer before switching

Exercise 7.5: Independence Builder

Set a metronome to 70 BPM. Play the island strum continuously for 2 minutes, switching between C and F every 8 beats. Focus on keeping the strum perfectly steady through the changes.

7.5 Summary

Advanced rhythm techniques add dimension to your playing. Syncopation creates groove, percussion adds texture, compound time opens new musical doors, and swing feel unlocks blues and jazz.

Most importantly, developing independence between your hands allows you to play complex music fluently.

Practice Routine:

1. Practice syncopated strumming patterns with a metronome
2. Add chunks and taps to the island strum pattern
3. Work on the 6/8 pattern with Am–G–F–E7
4. Practice the shuffle strum over a 12-bar blues
5. Focus on chord changes without disrupting your strum pattern

Chapter 8

Playing in Different Keys

In this chapter, you will learn:

- Understand scales and what a musical key is
- Learn the chords in common keys (C, G, D, F, A)
- Transpose songs from one key to another
- Use the Nashville Number System
- Choose the best key for your voice

8.1 The Major Scale

To understand keys, you first need to understand Scales. A scale is a set of notes arranged in ascending or descending order that forms the basis of melodies and chords.

The Major Scale follows a specific pattern of whole steps (W; two frets) and half steps (H; one fret):

W – W – H – W – W – W – H

Starting on C, this gives us the **C major scale**:

C – D – E – F – G – A – B – C

Every major key uses the same pattern starting on a different note. The G major scale, for instance, starts on G and follows the same whole/half step formula, which is why it includes an F♯ instead of F.

Why does this matter? Because the chords in a key are built from these scale notes. When we stack notes from the scale in thirds (skipping every other note), we get the chords that naturally "belong together" in that key. This is why certain chord progressions sound right—they are all drawn from the same scale.

Tip: For a deeper look at scales on the fretboard—including scale diagrams, the natural minor scale, and the pentatonic scale—see Chapter 11.

8.2 What Is a Key?

A Key is the "home base" of a song—the chord and scale that everything else relates to. When someone says a song is "in the key of C," they mean:

- The C chord feels like "home"
- The melody uses notes from the C major scale
- The other chords are related to C in predictable ways

8.3 Chords in a Key

Each key has a family of chords that belong together. These are built on each note of the Major Scale.

The Key of C Major

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii°
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	Bdim

Roman numerals indicate the chord's position and quality:

- Uppercase (I, IV, V) = major chords
- Lowercase (ii, iii, vi) = minor chords
- vii° = diminished chord

Key Concept: The I, IV, and V chords are the most important in any key. Learn these three first when playing in a new key.

You have been playing an I-IV-V progression since Chapter 2—now you know what the numbers mean.

The Key of G Major

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii°
G	Am	Bm	C	D	Em	F♯dim

The Key of F Major

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii°
F	Gm	Am	B♭	C	Dm	Edim

The Key of D Major

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii°
D	Em	F♯m	G	A	Bm	C♯dim

The Key of A Major

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii°
A	Bm	C♯m	D	E	F♯m	G♯dim

8.4 Transposing Songs

Transpose means moving a song from one key to another. Common reasons to transpose:

- Match your vocal range
- Avoid difficult chords
- Play with other musicians in a preferred key

Step-by-Step Transposition

1. Identify the key of the original song (usually the first or last chord)
2. Convert each chord to its Roman numeral in that key
3. Apply those Roman numerals to the new key

Example: Transpose from C to G

Original (Key of C)	→	New (Key of G)
C (I)		G (I)
Am (vi)		Em (vi)
F (IV)		C (IV)
G (V)		D (V)

Exercise 8.1: Transposition Practice

Transpose this progression from the key of G to the key of D:
Original: G – Em – C – D

Hint: In G, this is I – vi – IV – V

Quick Transposition Chart

Use this chart to transpose quickly between common keys:

	C	**G**	**D**	**F**	**A**
I	C	G	D	F	A
ii	Dm	Am	Em	Gm	Bm
iii	Em	Bm	F♯m	Am	C♯m
IV	F	C	G	B♭	D
V	G	D	A	C	E
vi	Am	Em	Bm	Dm	F♯m

vii° is left out because it is rare in popular songs; the full chord families, including vii°, are in Appendix G.

8.5 The Nashville Number System

Professional musicians often use the Nashville Number System, which replaces chord names with numbers. This makes transposition instant.

How It Works

Instead of writing: C – Am – F – G

Write: 1 – 6m – 4 – 5

Each number is the scale degree the chord's root sits on—exactly what the Roman numerals in the transposition section encoded. Minor chords get an "m," so vi becomes 6m.

Now the progression can be played in *any* key just by knowing that key's chord family.

Tip: The Nashville system is especially useful when playing with other musicians. Someone might say "let's try it in A"—if you know the numbers, you can switch keys instantly.

Common Number Patterns

Pattern	**Songs That Use It**
1 – 5 – 6m – 4	"Let It Be," "With or Without You"
1 – 4 – 5	"Twist and Shout," "La Bamba"
1 – 6m – 4 – 5	"Stand By Me," "Last Kiss"
2m – 5 – 1	Jazz standards (the ii-V-I)

8.6 Finding the Right Key for Your Voice

When singing, the key should let you hit all notes comfortably:

1. Identify the highest and lowest notes in the melody
2. Sing through and notice where you strain (too high) or get weak (too low)
3. Transpose up or down until the melody sits comfortably in your range

---

Tip: Most people have about a two-octave comfortable range. The "sweet spot" for singing is often in the middle of your range, not at the extremes.

8.7 Ukulele-Friendly Keys

Some keys are easier on ukulele due to chord shapes:

Easiest: C major, G major, F major

Moderate: D major, A major

Harder: E major, B major, keys with many sharps/flats

When possible, transpose songs to ukulele-friendly keys to avoid excessive barre chords.

8.8 Using a Capo

A Capo is a clamp that presses across all strings at a given fret, effectively raising the pitch of every string. It lets you transpose a song *without changing your chord shapes*:

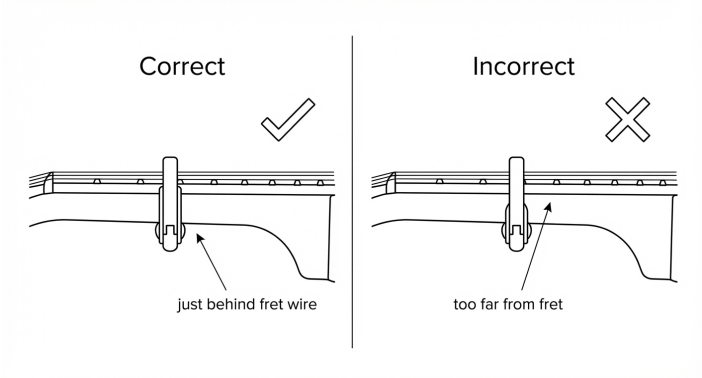
- Capo on fret 2, playing C shapes = sounds in the key of D
- Capo on fret 5, playing C shapes = sounds in the key of F

Capo Fret	C Shapes Sound As
1	C♯/D♭
2	D
3	D♯/E♭
4	E
5	F
7	G

Key Concept: A capo is the simplest way to change key. Use it when a song needs a difficult key (like E♭—C shapes at fret 3) but you want to keep easy open chord shapes.

Capo vs. barre chords: A capo is quicker and preserves open-string voicings; barre chords offer more flexibility within a song.

Capo vs. transposition: Transposing changes your chord shapes; a capo keeps them the same while shifting pitch.



Place the capo just behind the fret wire, not in the middle of the fret space.

8.9 Understanding Song Structure

Most songs follow a predictable structure. Recognizing these sections helps you learn songs faster and perform them more confidently:

Intro: An instrumental opening, often 4–8 bars. May use the verse or chorus progression.

Verse: Tells the story. The melody and chords repeat, but lyrics change each time.

Chorus: The emotional center—same lyrics and melody each time. Usually louder or higher energy.

Bridge: A contrasting section that appears once or twice, providing variety before a final chorus. Often uses different chords from the verse and chorus.

Outro: The ending. May fade out, repeat the chorus, or return to the intro.

A common pop structure is: Intro – Verse – Chorus – Verse – Chorus – Bridge – Chorus – Outro.

Tip: When learning a new song, map out the structure first. Many songs have only two or three distinct chord progressions—one for the verse, one for the chorus, and sometimes one for the bridge.

Exercise 8.2: Nashville Numbers and Song Structure

Pick a song you know well. Write out its structure (verse, chorus, bridge) and convert the chords to Nashville numbers. Then transpose the song to a different key using only the numbers.

8.10 Summary

Understanding keys allows you to play songs in any key and collaborate with other musicians. Learn the I-IV-V chords in common keys, practice transposing familiar songs, and use the Nashville Number System for quick key changes. For a reference of common progressions in every key, see Appendix G.

Practice Routine:

1. Memorize the I-IV-V chords in C, G, D, F, and A
2. Transpose "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" from C to G
3. Write out a song you know using Nashville numbers
4. Find the best key for your voice on a song you want to sing

Milestone: What You Can Do Now

By completing this part, you have achieved the following skills:

- Play in multiple keys (C, G, D, F, and A major)
- Use barre chord shapes to access any chord in any position
- Play seventh chords for richer harmonic color
- Transpose songs between keys using Roman numerals or the Nashville system

- Understand the I-IV-V relationship in any key
- Play intermediate songs with varied chord progressions

Part III

Mastery

Chapter 9

Jazz Chords

In this chapter, you will learn:

- Understand extended chord theory (9ths, 11ths, 13ths)
- Learn essential jazz voicings for ukulele
- Master common jazz chord substitutions
- Play through jazz standards using authentic voicings

Before You Begin: This chapter represents a significant step up in complexity. Jazz harmony builds extensively on concepts from earlier chapters:

- **Seventh chords** (Chapter 6)—jazz voicings are extensions of these
- **Keys and chord families** (Chapter 8)—essential for understanding ii-V-I progressions
- **Barre chord technique** (Chapter 5)—many jazz voicings require this skill

If these concepts feel unfamiliar, revisit those chapters first. That said, even learning just one or two new chord types (like add9 or sixth chords) will expand your sound. Take it at your own pace—you can always return later when you're ready for more.

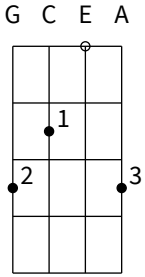
9.1 Beyond Seventh Chords

Jazz harmony extends beyond seventh chords by adding more notes from the scale. These create rich, complex sounds characteristic of jazz, bossa nova, and sophisticated pop.

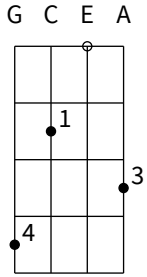
Ninth Chords

A **ninth chord** adds the 9th scale degree (same as the 2nd, but an octave higher). On ukulele, we often omit some notes to make these chords playable.

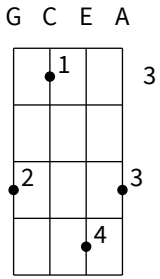
C9



Cmaj9



Cm9

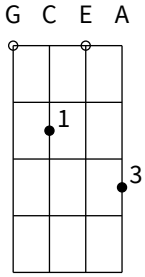


Add Chords

Add chords include an extra note without the seventh:

- **Cadd9**: C-E-G-D (major triad plus 9th)
- **Cadd2**: Same as add9 but the 2nd is in a lower octave

Cadd9

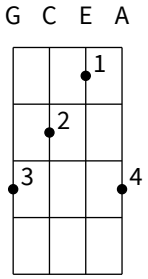


Tip: Add9 chords are more accessible than full 9th chords and sound great in pop and folk contexts. Substitute them for plain major chords to add color.

Eleventh and Thirteenth Chords

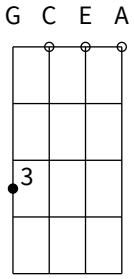
Eleventh chords add the 11th (same as the 4th, an octave higher). On ukulele, with only four strings, you must omit notes—typically the 3rd, which clashes with the 11th, or the 5th:

C11



Thirteenth chords add the 13th (same as the 6th, an octave higher). Again, omissions are necessary:

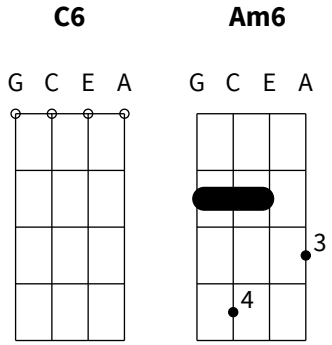
C13



Tip: On ukulele, 11th and 13th voicings often sound nearly identical to simpler sus4 or 6th chords. Don't worry about including every note—jazz is about *implying* harmony, and three or four well-chosen notes are enough.

9.2 Sixth Chords

Sixth chords add the 6th scale degree to a triad. They have a pleasant, vintage sound common in jazz standards and Hawaiian music.



C6 with all open strings is a beautiful, easy jazz voicing.

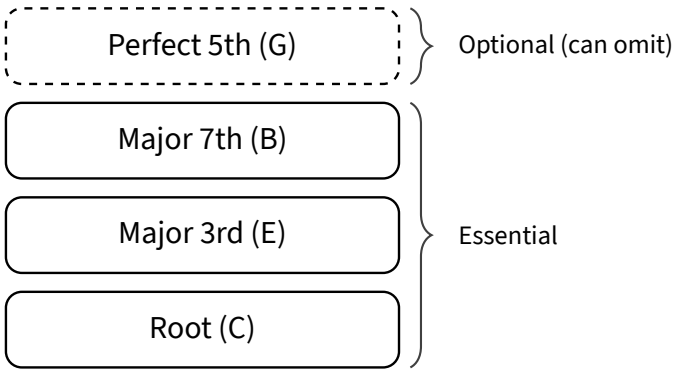
> **Key Concept:** Major 6 chords and minor 7 chords built on different roots are often interchangeable. C6 (C-E-G-A) contains the same notes as Am7 (A-C-E-G).

9.3 Jazz Voicings

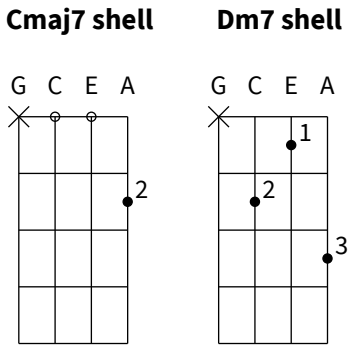
Jazz players use specific Voicings—particular arrangements of notes—to create smooth voice leading and characteristic sounds.

Shell Voicings

Shell voicings use just the essential notes: root, third, and seventh. These are practical for Comping (accompaniment).



Shell voicings keep root, 3rd, and 7th; the 5th is optional.

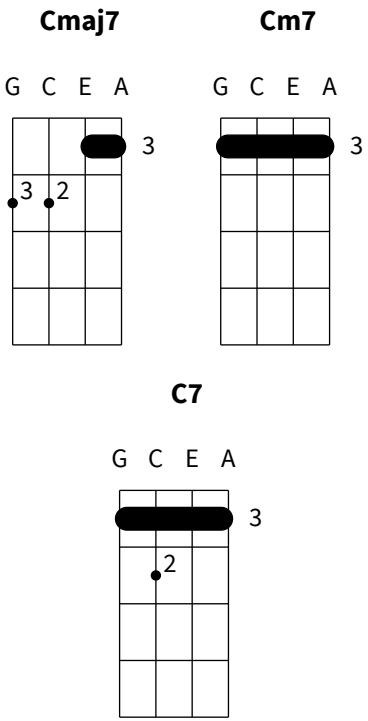


Both shapes skip the G string (marked with an x), so you hear just those three notes.

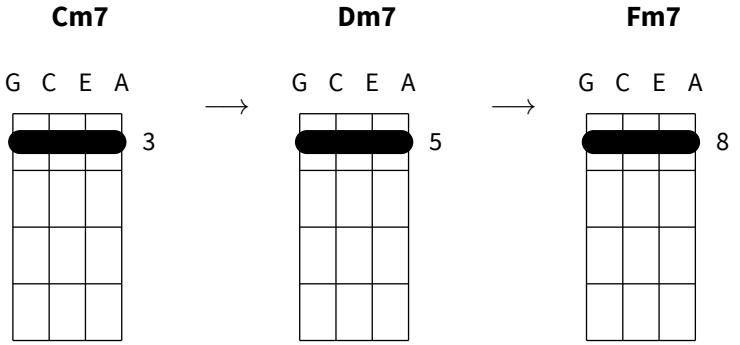
Moveable Jazz Shapes

Jazz players use the same chord types—maj7, m7, and dom7—at different neck positions for smooth voice leading. Instead of jumping to open chord shapes, you move a compact shape up or down a few frets.

Here are three moveable shapes, all shown at the 3rd position:



Each shape slides up or down the neck to produce the same chord quality on a different root. For example, the Cm7 shape at the 5th fret becomes Dm7; at the 8th fret it becomes Fm7.



The same chord shape at different fret positions produces different chords.

Tip: Choose the voicing where your fingers move the shortest distance from the previous chord. Smooth voice leading—small, stepwise motion between chords—is the hallmark of jazz accompaniment.

Exercise 9.1: Sliding Moveable Shapes

All three shapes have their root on the A string, so the fret you play them at names the chord. Slide each shape from the 3rd fret to the 5th and then the 8th:

1. m7 shape: Cm7 → Dm7 → Fm7
2. dom7 shape: C7 → D7 → F7
3. maj7 shape: Cmaj7 → Dmaj7 → Fmaj7

Notice that you are using the same shapes at different fret positions.

9.4 Chord Substitutions

Chord Substitution means replacing one chord with another that serves a similar harmonic function.

Tritone Substitution

The most famous jazz substitution: replace a dominant 7th chord with another dominant 7th a Tritone (6 half-steps) away.

G7 can be replaced by D♭7

Both chords share the same tritone interval (B and F) and resolve similarly to C.

Relative Major/Minor

Substitute a chord with its relative major or minor:

- C can become Am
- Dm can become F

Extended Substitution

Replace simpler chords with extended versions:

- C → Cmaj7 → Cmaj9 → C6/9 (a sixth chord with a 9th added—C-E-G-A-D; the 6th replaces the maj7th for a brighter color)
- Dm → Dm7 → Dm9 → Dm11

9.5 Essential Jazz Progressions

The ii-V-I

The foundation of jazz harmony:

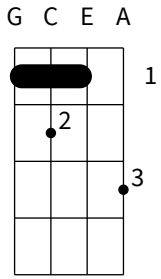
$$\text{Dm7} \rightarrow \text{G7} \rightarrow \text{Cmaj7}$$

Variations:

- Minor ii-V-i: Dm7♭5 → G7♭9 (G7 with a flatted 9th, A♭—the classic tense dominant in minor keys) → Cm7
- With tritone sub: Dm7 → D♭7 → Cmaj7

Note that the "ii" chord in a minor ii-V-i is a **half-diminished** chord (also written m7♭5). It has a minor triad with a flatted 5th and a minor 7th—darker than a plain minor 7th, and distinct from the fully diminished 7th covered in Chapter 6. The standard easy voicing for Dm7♭5—the "ii" chord of the minor ii-V-i above—bars the 1st fret across the E, C, and G strings, with the middle finger on the 2nd fret of the C string and the ring finger on the 3rd fret of the A string (D-F-A♭-C):

Dm7♭5



Rhythm Changes

Based on "I Got Rhythm":

$$C \rightarrow Am7 \rightarrow Dm7 \rightarrow G7 \text{ (repeat)}$$

The Jazz Blues

A jazzed-up 12-bar blues:

C7	F7	C7	Gm7 C7
F7	F7	C7	Em7 A7
Dm7	G7	C7 A7	Dm7 G7

Exercise 9.2: Jazz Blues Practice

Play through the jazz blues progression above. Start with one strum per chord, then add a jazz comping pattern.

9.6 Comping Rhythms

Comping is the rhythmic accompaniment style used by jazz players. Key characteristics:

- **Syncopation**: Play on offbeats and unexpected moments
- **Space**: Leave gaps rather than strumming constantly
- **Accents**: Punch certain beats for emphasis
- **Responsiveness**: React to what others are playing

Basic Comping Patterns

Pattern 1: Two and Four

		↓				↓	↑
(1)	&	2	&	(3)	&	4	&

The empty cells indicate rests (no strum). This leaves space while maintaining groove.

Pattern 2: Charleston

↓			↓	↑			
1	&	(2)	&	3	&	(4)	&

The syncopated hit on the "and" of 2 gives this pattern a swinging, bouncy feel.

Pattern 3: Bossa Nova

↓			↓	↓			↓
1	&	(2)	&	3	&	(4)	&

This Latin-influenced pattern works beautifully with major 7th and minor 7th voicings.

Exercise 9.3: Comping Practice

Choose one comping pattern and play through the ii-V-I (Dm7–G7–Cmaj7). Once comfortable, try the same progression with a different comping pattern. Notice how the pattern changes the feel without changing the harmony.

9.7 Summary

Jazz chords open a world of sophisticated harmony. Start with sixth chords and add9 voicings, then explore ninth chords and substitutions. The ii-V-I progression is essential—practice it in all keys. Comping rhythms add the characteristic jazz feel.

Practice Routine:

1. Learn C6, Cmaj9, and Cadd9 shapes
2. Practice the ii-V-I in keys of C, G, and F
3. Try tritone substitution: Dm7 → D♭7 (the dom7 shape at the 4th fret—D♭ on the A string) → Cmaj7
4. Play through the jazz blues with a comping rhythm
5. Listen to jazz ukulele players like Lyle Ritz for inspiration

Chapter 10

Fingerstyle Techniques

In this chapter, you will learn:

- Master right-hand fingerpicking patterns
- Learn classical and Travis picking techniques
- Explore campanella (bell-like) playing
- Incorporate harmonics into your playing
- Use expressive techniques: hammer-ons, pull-offs, slides, and bends
- Arrange melodies with accompaniment

10.1 Fingerpicking Foundations

In Fingerstyle playing, each finger of the picking hand plucks individual strings rather than strumming across all strings. This allows you to play melody, harmony, and bass simultaneously.

Right-Hand Notation

Fingerstyle uses letter abbreviations from Spanish:

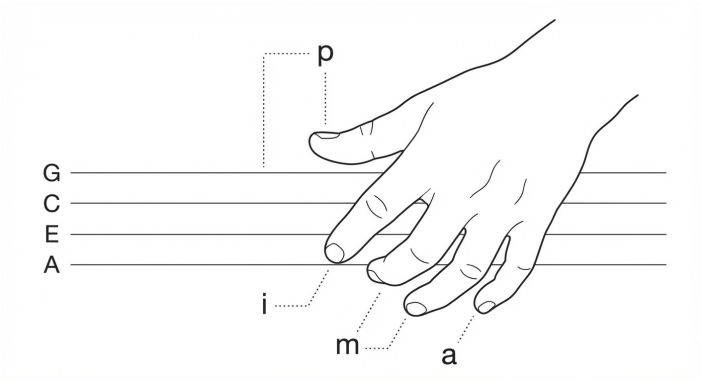
- **p** (pulgar): Thumb
- **i** (índice): Index finger
- **m** (medio): Middle finger
- **a** (anular): Ring finger

Standard Assignment

The traditional assignment for ukulele:

Finger	String(s)
p	G string (and sometimes C)
i	C or E string
m	E or A string
a	A string

Tip: The exact assignment varies by style and pattern. These are starting points—develop flexibility to adapt to different musical situations.



Right-hand fingerpicking position with p-i-m-a finger assignments.

10.2 Classical Technique

Classical fingerstyle emphasizes clean tone, proper positioning, and precise control.

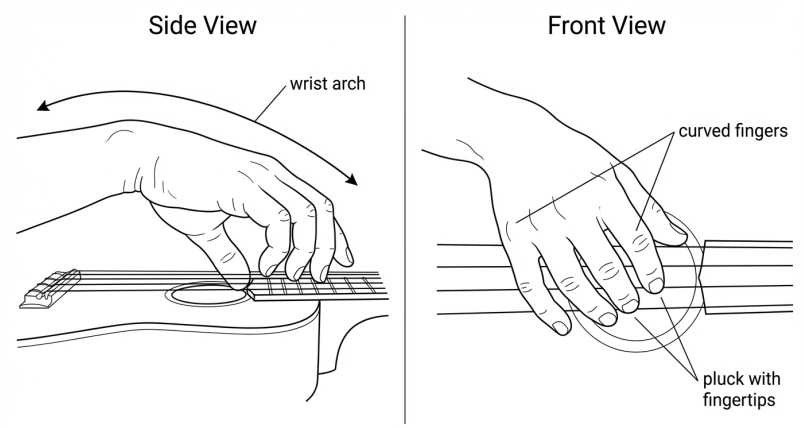
Hand Position

1. Wrist slightly arched, not flat or kinked

2. Fingers curved naturally

3. Pluck with the fleshy part of fingertips

4. Follow through toward the palm (rest stroke) or away from strings (free stroke)



Classical fingerstyle hand position: wrist arch (side) and curved fingers (front).

Rest Stroke vs. Free Stroke

Rest stroke (apoyando): After plucking, the finger comes to rest on the adjacent string. Produces a fuller, louder tone.

Free stroke (tirando): The finger moves freely into the air after plucking. Allows faster playing and arpeggios.

Exercise 10.1: Tone Production

Using rest strokes, play each open string slowly 10 times, focusing on producing a clear, full tone. Then repeat with free strokes. Notice the difference in sound.

10.3 Fingerpicking Patterns

Pattern 1: Basic Arpeggio

The simplest pattern—thumb to ring finger, from the G string to the A string:

```
p   i   m   a
G   C   E   A
```

Apply to any chord shape for a flowing, harp-like sound.

Pattern 2: Pinch Pattern

Pinch the outer strings together, then fill with inner strings:

```
p+a   i   m   i
G+A   C   E   C
```

Pattern 3: Travis Picking

Travis picking (named after Merle Travis) uses an alternating bass with melody notes on top.

```
p   m   p   m   p   m   p   m
 G   E   C   E   G   E   C   E
```

The thumb alternates between two bass notes (G and C strings) while the middle finger plays the melody on the E string. With high-G tuning the open G string actually sounds above the E string—the thumb still supplies the steady alternating pulse, but it is not a true bass line the way it is on a guitar or with a low-G string.

Exercise 10.2: Travis Picking Practice

Using a C chord:

1. Play the G string with your thumb
2. Play the E string with your middle finger
3. Play the C string with your thumb
4. Play the E string with your middle finger
5. Repeat smoothly, keeping the alternating thumb steady

Start very slowly (40 BPM) and gradually increase tempo.

Pattern 4: Inside-Out

This pattern starts from the middle strings and moves outward:

```
i   m   p   a   i   m   p   a
 C   E   G   A   C   E   G   A
```

The pattern creates a distinctive "opening" sound, expanding from the center. Works well for building intensity.

Pattern 5: Outside-In

The reverse of Inside-Out—start from outer strings, move inward:

```
p   a   i   m   p   a   i   m
 G   A   C   E   G   A   C   E
```

This creates a "closing" or converging sound. Combine with Inside-Out for expressive contrast.

Pattern 6: Clawhammer

Clawhammer is a technique borrowed from banjo playing that produces a distinctive rhythmic, percussive sound. Instead of plucking upward with fingertips, you strike downward with the back of your fingernail. Clawhammer works best with high-G (re-entrant) tuning, where the G string serves as a high drone—similar to a banjo's 5th string. With low-G tuning, the drone effect is lost and the technique sounds less characteristic.

Basic Technique

1. Curl your fingers into a loose claw shape
2. Strike down on a melody string with the back of your index or middle fingernail
3. Let your thumb brush or pluck the G string on the next beat
4. The motion is a downward "drop" of the hand, not an upward pluck

Basic Clawhammer Pattern

```
STRIKE   THUMB   STRIKE   ---
(melody)   G   (melody)   rest

  1        2       3       4
```

The "bum-ditty" rhythm (STRIKE-thumb-STRIKE) is the foundation of clawhammer style.

Exercise 10.3: Clawhammer Introduction

1. Form a C chord
2. With your hand in a loose claw, strike down on the A string with your nail
3. Brush the G string with your thumb
4. Strike the A string again
5. Practice slowly: "bum-dit-ty (rest), bum-dit-ty (rest)"

This old-time technique takes practice but creates a unique, driving sound.

Tremolo

Tremolo is a technique that creates sustained, shimmering melody lines by rapidly repeating a single note while the thumb provides accompaniment. It's one of the most expressive techniques on ukulele.

Basic Technique

The standard tremolo pattern uses thumb and three fingers:

```
                p   a   m   i   p   a   m   i
(bass)  (melody repeated 3x)  (bass)  (melody repeated 3x)
```

1. Your thumb (p) plays a bass note on the G or C string
2. Your ring (a), middle (m), and index (i) fingers rapidly pluck the same melody string in sequence
3. The three melody notes should sound nearly continuous
4. Repeat the pattern smoothly

Building Speed

1. Start very slowly—each note clearly separated
2. Use a metronome at 40 BPM, one note per beat
3. Gradually increase speed until notes blur together
4. The goal is a sustained, singing tone on the melody

Exercise 10.4: Tremolo Practice

1. Hold a C chord
2. Play the G string with your thumb
3. Play the A string three times: ring, middle, index
4. Repeat slowly: "bass-a-m-i, bass-a-m-i"
5. Once comfortable, speed up until the melody sounds continuous

Tip: Tremolo requires patience—it may take weeks to achieve a smooth, continuous sound. Practice for short periods daily rather than long sessions.

10.4 Campanella Technique

Campanella (Italian for "little bells") is a technique where notes ring into each other, creating a harp-like sustain.

The Concept

Instead of playing consecutive scale notes on the same string, you use different strings so notes overlap:

Standard C scale: C-D-E-F-G (on one or two strings)
Campanella C scale: Each note on a different string where possible

Campanella Fingering

For the C major scale:

- C: Open C string
- D: 2nd fret, C string
- E: Open E string
- F: 5th fret, C string (let E ring)
- G: Open G string
- A: Open A string
- B: 4th fret, G string
- C: 3rd fret, A string (or 5th fret, G string)

The result is a wash of overlapping notes that sounds like bells or a harp.

Tip: Campanella arrangements require specific fingerings for each piece. Many Hawaiian slack-key guitar songs translate well to campanella ukulele.

10.5 Harmonics

Harmonics are bell-like tones produced by lightly touching the string at specific points rather than pressing to the fretboard.

Natural Harmonics

The clearest harmonics occur at these frets:

- **12th fret**: One octave above the open string (easiest)
- **7th fret**: An octave plus a fifth above
- **5th fret**: Two octaves above

Technique

1. Lightly touch (don't press) the string directly above the fret wire
2. Pluck the string while touching
3. Immediately lift your finger
4. A clear, bell-like tone should ring out

Exercise 10.5: Harmonic Practice

1. Play the 12th fret harmonic on each string
2. Play the 7th fret harmonics
3. Try playing a chord using harmonics at the 12th fret
4. Combine open notes with harmonics in a melody

Artificial Harmonics

Artificial harmonics are produced by fretting a note normally, then touching 12 frets higher with your picking hand while plucking. This extends harmonics to any note.

Technique

1. Fret a note normally with your left hand
2. With your right-hand index finger, lightly touch the string exactly 12 frets above the fretted note (directly over the fret wire)
3. While touching, pluck the string with your right-hand ring finger or thumb
4. Immediately lift the touching finger—the harmonic should ring out

The key is simultaneous action: touch, pluck, and release in one smooth motion. Artificial harmonics are quieter than natural harmonics, so pluck firmly.

Exercise 10.6: Artificial Harmonic Practice

1. Fret the 3rd fret on the A string with your left hand
2. Touch lightly at the 15th fret with your right-hand index finger
3. Pluck with your right-hand ring finger and lift the touching finger
4. Try the same technique on each string: fret the 3rd fret, touch the 15th, pluck
5. Experiment with different fretted notes—each one produces a harmonic 12 frets higher

10.6 Expressive Techniques

These left-hand techniques add vocal-like expression to single-note lines. They appear in tablature as symbols (see Appendix H), but here we focus on the physical technique.

Hammer-Ons

A Hammer-On (written "h" in TAB, e.g., 2h4) sounds a note by "hammering" a fretting finger onto the string without plucking:

1. Pluck a fretted or open string normally
2. While it rings, bring another finger down sharply onto a higher fret on the same string
3. The impact produces the second note without a second pluck

The key is a firm, quick strike—use the fingertip and let the momentum do the work. The second note should ring as clearly as the first.

Pull-Offs

A Pull-Off (written "p" in TAB, e.g., 4p2) is the reverse of a hammer-on:

1. Fret two notes on the same string (e.g., index on 2nd fret, ring on 4th fret)
2. Pluck the string
3. "Pull" the higher finger off the string with a slight sideways motion
4. The lower fretted note sounds without a second pluck

Tip: The pulling motion is a slight downward flick, not a straight lift. This gives the string enough energy to keep vibrating.

Exercise 10.7: Hammer-On and Pull-Off Practice

On the A string:

1. Play open A, hammer-on to 2nd fret. Repeat 10 times.
2. Fret 2nd fret, pluck, pull-off to open. Repeat 10 times.
3. Combine: open, hammer 2nd, pull-off to open, hammer 2nd... in a continuous cycle.

These ornaments are fundamental to Hawaiian, blues, and folk ukulele styles.

Slides

A Slide (written "/" for up or "\" for down in TAB) connects two notes by sliding a fretting finger along the string:

1. Fret and pluck a note
2. While the string rings, slide your finger up or down to a new fret
3. Maintain pressure throughout—the slide should be smooth and audible

Slides add a vocal, gliding quality. Use them between melody notes for a legato feel, or slide into a note from a fret or two below for emphasis.

Bends

A **bend** (written "b" in TAB) raises a note's pitch by pushing the string sideways across the fretboard:

1. Fret a note firmly
2. Push the string toward the ceiling (away from the floor) while maintaining pressure
3. The pitch rises—a half-step bend raises the note by one fret, a full bend by two

> **Important:** Bends require more force on ukulele than guitar due to nylon strings. Start with half-step bends on the A string (the lowest-tension string) at higher frets (7th–10th), where the shorter vibrating length makes the bend easier to control.

Exercise 10.8: Slides and Bends

1. On the E string: fret the 3rd fret, pluck, slide to the 5th fret. Reverse.
2. On the A string at the 7th fret: pluck and bend up a half step (should match the 8th fret pitch). Release slowly.
3. Combine: slide from 5th to 7th fret on the A string, then bend up a half step at the 7th fret.

10.7 Arranging for Solo Ukulele

Fingerstyle allows you to arrange songs for solo performance, combining melody, harmony, and bass into a self-contained arrangement.

Basic Approach

1. **Learn the melody** on a single string (usually the A string, the highest)
2. **Find chord shapes** that include the melody note as the highest note. You may need to use partial chords or inversions so the melody stays on top.
3. **Add bass notes** with your thumb on the G or C string. Use the chord root as your primary bass note.
4. **Fill gaps** with arpeggiated chord tones between melody notes

Choosing Bass Notes

For each chord, use the root note as your primary bass. In re-entrant tuning, the C string is your lowest note, and the thumb typically handles the C and G strings for bass and rhythm. For variety, alternate between the root and the 5th of the chord. For example, over a C chord, alternate between C (open C string, plucked by your thumb) and G (open G string). This creates a walking bass feel that keeps the arrangement lively.

Example: Arranging "Twinkle, Twinkle"

Here is the first phrase arranged for solo ukulele, with the melody on the A and G strings and harmony on the E string:

Twinkle, Twinkle — Solo Arrangement

	C				F		C	
A:	3	3			0	0		
E:	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
C:								
G:	0		0	0	2		0	

The melody (C–C–G–G–A–A–G) alternates between the A string (the C's and A's) and the open G string (the G's). The E string fills in the harmony (E under the C chord, F under the F chord). Read each column as notes played simultaneously or in quick succession.

Exercise 10.9: Arrange "Happy Birthday"

Using the steps above, arrange the first line of "Happy Birthday" (key of C: chords C and G7):

1. Work out the melody on the A string
2. Add bass notes on the G string: the open G works over both chords (the fifth of C, the root of G7)
3. Fill in harmony on the E and C strings

Tip: Start with songs that have one chord per measure—this gives you time to set up each chord shape around the melody note before the next change.

10.8 Summary

Fingerstyle opens vast musical possibilities on ukulele. Master basic patterns first, then explore Travis picking and campanella techniques. Harmonics add ethereal color. With these skills, you can create complete solo arrangements that sound like multiple instruments.

Practice Routine:

1. Practice the basic arpeggio pattern on C, Am, F, G progression
2. Work on Travis picking for 15 minutes daily
3. Learn to produce clean harmonics at the 12th and 7th frets
4. Try arranging a simple melody (like "Happy Birthday") for solo ukulele

Chapter 11

Music Theory for Ukulele

In this chapter, you will learn:

- Play scales across the full fretboard
- Learn the harmonic minor and pentatonic scales
- Understand the circle of fifths and its applications
- Explore modes and their distinct characters
- Apply theory to improvisation and composition

11.1 Scales on the Fretboard

Music theory is the grammar of music. Understanding it helps you learn faster, improvise, compose, and communicate with other musicians.

In Chapter 6, you learned the chromatic scale, intervals, and how chords are built by stacking thirds. In Chapter 8, you learned how the major scale generates the chords in a key. This chapter takes those foundations further—playing scales across the full fretboard, exploring modes and advanced scales, and applying theory to improvisation.

11.2 Major and Minor Scales

The Major Scale on the Fretboard

Recall that the Major Scale follows the pattern W–W–H–W–W–W–H (Chapter 8). Now let's learn to play it across the full ukulele fretboard.

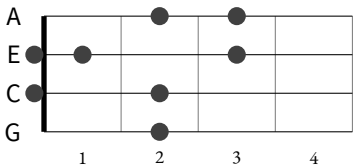
Exercise 11.1: C Major Scale

Play the C major scale on your ukulele (each column is one fret):

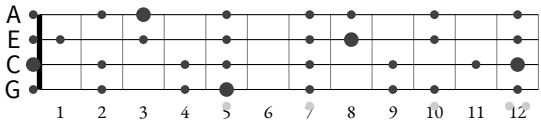
A string:	Open (A)	–	2nd fret (B)	3rd fret (C)
E string:	Open (E)	1st fret (F)	–	3rd fret (G)
C string:	Open (C)	–	2nd fret (D)	–

Practice ascending and descending until smooth.

C major scale positions on the fretboard:



C major scale across the full fretboard:



Root notes (C) are shown larger. This diagram reveals how the same scale pattern repeats up the neck, opening possibilities for solo improvisation.

The Natural Minor Scale

The **natural minor scale** has a different pattern:

W – H – W – W – H – W – W

A Natural Minor Scale: A – B – C – D – E – F – G – A

The minor scale adds introspection and emotional depth—where major feels resolved and bright, minor feels contemplative, sometimes melancholic.

Notice that A minor and C major share the same notes—they are Relative Keys.

11.3 The Harmonic Minor Scale

The **harmonic minor scale** raises the 7th note of the natural minor scale by one half step. This creates a strong pull back to the root—the reason minor-key songs often use a major V chord (like E or E7 in the key of A minor).

W – H – W – W – H – W^+ – H

(W^+ indicates an augmented 2nd—three half steps.)

A Harmonic Minor Scale: A – B – C – D – E – F – G♯ – A

Compare with the natural minor (A–B–C–D–E–F–G–A): the only difference is G♯ instead of G. That raised 7th creates the distinctive, slightly exotic sound heard in songs like "Hava Nagila" and many flamenco and classical pieces.

Exercise 11.2: Harmonic Minor Practice

Play the A harmonic minor scale in first position, one note at a time:

C string:	Open (C) → 2nd fret (D)
E string:	Open (E) → 1st fret (F) → 4th fret (G♯)
A string:	Open (A) → 2nd fret (B) → 3rd fret (C)

Play ascending (C string first) then descending (A string first). Listen for the dramatic leap between F and G♯—that augmented 2nd is the harmonic minor's signature sound.

11.4 The Circle of Fifths

The Circle of Fifths is a diagram showing the relationship between keys. Moving clockwise, each key is a fifth higher; counterclockwise, a fourth higher.

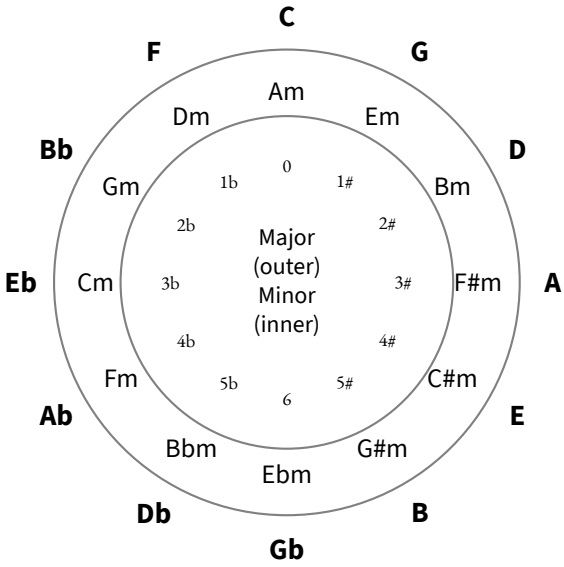
Key Signatures

Key	Sharps/Flats	Accidentals
C major	0	None
G major	1♯	F♯
D major	2♯	F♯, C♯
F major	1♭	B♭
B♭ major	2♭	B♭, E♭

Using the Circle

The circle helps you:

- Find related keys for modulation (changing key within a song)
- Identify which chords belong together
- Understand sharp/flat key signatures
- Find chord substitutions (chords close on the circle relate well)



Moving clockwise adds sharps; counterclockwise adds flats. Adjacent keys share six of seven notes, making modulation between neighbors smooth.

11.5 Modes

Modes are scales derived from the major scale by starting on different degrees. Each has a distinct character.

Mode	Starting Degree	Character	Example
Ionian	1st	Major (bright, happy)	C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C
Dorian	2nd	Minor (jazzy)	D-E-F-G-A-B-C-D
Phrygian	3rd	Minor (Spanish/exotic)	E-F-G-A-B-C-D-E
Lydian	4th	Major (dreamy)	F-G-A-B-C-D-E-F
Mixolydian	5th	Major (bluesy)	G-A-B-C-D-E-F-G
Aeolian	6th	Natural minor	A-B-C-D-E-F-G-A
Locrian	7th	Diminished (dark)	B-C-D-E-F-G-A-B

Exercise 11.3: Modal Exploration

Play each mode starting from the same root note (C) to hear their distinct characters:

- C Ionian (C major scale)
- C Dorian (C–D–E♭–F–G–A–B♭; like C minor but with a natural 6th)
- C Mixolydian (C–D–E–F–G–A–B♭; like C major but with a flat 7th)

11.6 The Pentatonic Scale

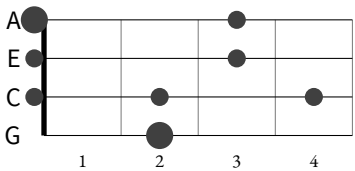
The most practical tool for improvisation is the Pentatonic Scale, which uses five notes instead of seven. It's easier to use because it avoids "wrong" notes.

C Major Pentatonic: C – D – E – G – A

A Minor Pentatonic: A – C – D – E – G

These two scales use the same notes—relative pentatonics.

A minor pentatonic pattern (notes: A–C–D–E–G):



The root notes (A) are shown with larger circles. This five-note scale works over both A minor and C major progressions.

The Blues Scale

The **blues scale** adds one note to the minor pentatonic—the "blue note" (a flatted 5th). This single addition gives the scale its gritty, soulful character:

A Blues Scale: A – C – D – D♯/E♭ – E – G

The blue note (D♯/E♭) creates deliberate tension. It doesn't resolve neatly, which is exactly what gives blues its raw expressiveness. Use the blues scale over any blues, rock, or funk progression.

Exercise 11.4: Blues Scale Practice

Play the A blues scale in first position (each column is one fret):

A string:	Open (A)	–	–	–	–
E string:	Open (E)	–	–	3rd fret (G)	–
C string:	Open (C)	–	2nd fret (D)	3rd fret (D♯)	–
G string:	–	–	2nd fret (A)	–	–

Try bending the blue note (D♯) slightly for an even more expressive sound.

11.7 Applying Theory to Playing

Improvisation

When improvising over chords:

- Over a C major chord, use C major scale or C major pentatonic

- Over an Am chord, use A minor scale or A minor pentatonic
- Over a G7 chord, use G Mixolydian mode

Composition

When writing songs:

- Use diatonic chords (chords from the key) for stability
- Borrow chords from the parallel key—the key with the same root (borrow from C minor while in C major)—for color
- Use the ii-V-I for strong resolutions

11.8 Summary

Music theory illuminates how music works. Scales provide the raw material for melodies and improvisation, the circle of fifths maps key relationships, and modes offer different flavors of the same notes. The harmonic minor and blues scales add expressive colors beyond the basic major and minor. Apply this knowledge to improvise with confidence and compose with intention.

Practice Routine:

1. Play the C major scale across the full fretboard
2. Practice the A harmonic minor scale, listening for the raised 7th
3. Improvise using the A minor pentatonic over an Am–Dm–E7 progression
4. Try the blues scale over a 12-bar blues in A
5. Study the circle of fifths and memorize key signatures for C, G, D, F
6. Experiment with Dorian and Mixolydian modes over a backing track

Chapter 12

Performance and Practice

In this chapter, you will learn:

- Design effective practice routines
- Overcome common playing problems
- Prepare for live performance
- Develop musicality and expression
- Continue your musical growth
- Learn new songs systematically and start playing by ear

12.1 Effective Practice

Quality of practice matters more than quantity. Here's how to make every minute count.

Practice Principles

Be consistent: Daily 15-minute sessions beat weekly 2-hour marathons

Be focused: Put away distractions; practice deliberately

Be patient: Skills develop over weeks and months, not hours

Be honest: Identify weaknesses and address them directly

The Practice Session Structure

A well-rounded 30-minute session might include:

1. **Warm-up (5 min):** Scales, finger exercises, easy material
2. **Technique work (10 min):** Chord transitions, new patterns, challenging passages

3. **Repertoire (10 min):** Songs you're learning or maintaining
4. **Play for fun (5 min):** Free exploration, improvisation, enjoyment

---

Tip: Use a timer. It's easy to spend all your time on what's comfortable and avoid challenges. Structure ensures balanced development.

Slow Practice

The most valuable practice technique is **slow practice**:

1. Set your metronome to half (or less) of the target tempo
2. Play perfectly at this slow speed
3. Increase tempo by 5 BPM only when completely comfortable
4. Never practice mistakes—slow down before errors occur

Key Concept: You are what you practice. Playing slowly and correctly builds good habits; playing fast with errors builds bad habits.

12.2 Troubleshooting Common Problems

Buzzing Strings

- Press closer to the fret wire (not on it)
- Use more finger pressure
- Check that your finger isn't touching adjacent strings
- Old strings buzz more—consider replacing them

Muted Notes

- Arch your fingers more—flat fingers mute neighbors
- Check thumb position on the back of the neck
- Ensure you're pressing with fingertips, not pads

Uneven Strumming

- Practice with a metronome—always
- Focus on smooth wrist motion, not arm movement
- Relax your hand; tension causes inconsistency

Slow Chord Changes

- Practice the specific transition, not just each chord
- Look for common fingers that can stay in place
- Visualize the next chord shape before moving
- Do one-minute change exercises daily

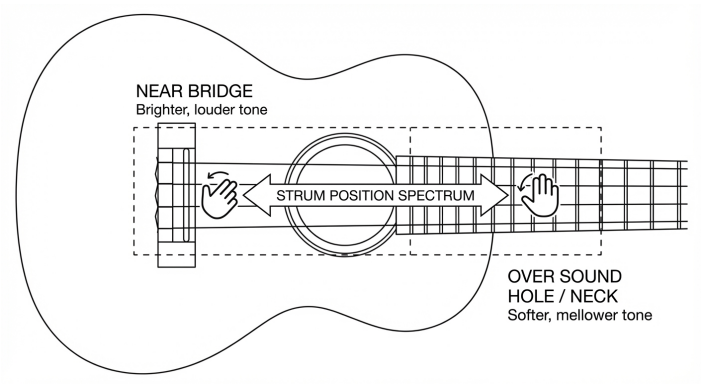
12.3 Building Musicality

Technical skill is only half the equation. **Musicality** is what makes playing meaningful.

Dynamics

Vary your volume expressively—you know the tools from Chapter 3 (piano, forte, crescendo); now use them to shape a whole song:

- Build intensity toward choruses
- Pull back during verses
- Accent important words or beats
- Let the song breathe with softer moments



Strumming position affects tone: brighter near the bridge, mellower near the neck.

Timing Nuance

Perfect metronomic timing isn't always musical:

- **Push** (play slightly ahead of the beat) for energy
- **Lay back** (play slightly behind) for a relaxed feel
- **Rubato**: Stretch time expressively in ballads

Emotional Connection

- Understand the lyrics and their meaning
- Think about who you're singing/playing for
- Let your body move naturally with the music
- Smile—it affects your tone and audience connection

12.4 Preparing for Performance

Whether playing for friends, at an open mic, or on stage, preparation is key.

Before the Performance

1. **Know your material:** Don't perform songs you're still learning
2. **Practice like you'll perform:** Stand, use a mic if available, run through your set
3. **Plan your setlist:** Vary tempo and mood; start and end strong
4. **Check your gear:** Fresh strings, tuned ukulele, backup picks/capo

Managing Stage Nerves

Performance anxiety is normal. Manage it with:

- **Deep breathing:** Slow, deep breaths calm the nervous system
- **Focus outward:** Think about giving to the audience, not judging yourself
- **Visualize success:** Imagine performing well before you go on
- **Accept imperfection:** Small mistakes happen; keep playing
- **Start with comfortable material:** Open with a song you know cold

During the Performance

- Make eye contact with the audience
- If you make a mistake, keep going—most people won't notice
- Talk to the audience between songs
- Enjoy yourself—enthusiasm is contagious

Tip: Record yourself performing and watch it back. This reveals habits and tics you're unaware of, and helps you improve your stage presence.

12.5 Continuing Your Journey

Finding Your Voice

As you advance, develop your personal style:

- Listen widely across genres and eras
- Experiment with different techniques
- Write your own songs or create arrangements
- Find what makes *your* playing unique

Learning Resources

- **Other players:** Join a local ukulele club or attend ukulele festivals—playing with others accelerates learning
- **Online:** Look for structured video courses on platforms like ArtistWorks or Patreon, where professional players offer graded lessons; YouTube channels dedicated to ukulele are also excellent for learning specific songs and techniques
- **Books:** Explore specialized method books such as Fred Sokolow's *Fretboard Roadmaps for Ukulele* (for theory) or Alistair Wood's *Ukulele for Dummies* (for a second perspective on fundamentals)
- **Teachers:** Consider private or online lessons for personalized feedback on technique

Setting Goals

Keep progressing by setting specific goals:

- Learn one new song per week
- Master a new technique each month
- Perform for others regularly
- Record yourself quarterly to track progress

12.6 Learning a New Song

Having a systematic process makes learning new songs faster and less frustrating. Follow these six steps to take any song from first listen to confident performance.

Listen and Map the Structure

Before touching your ukulele, listen to the song 2–3 times. Identify the sections—verse, chorus, bridge—and count how many bars each section lasts. Sketch a simple map:

Intro (4 bars) – Verse (8 bars) – Chorus (8 bars) – Verse – Chorus – Bridge (4 bars) – Chorus

This map is your roadmap for the entire learning process.

Learn the Chord Progression

Write out the chords for each section. Identify the key (see Section 12.7). Play through the chord progression slowly without singing, just to get the changes under your fingers. If a chord is unfamiliar, look it up and practice it in isolation before continuing.

Master the Transitions

Isolate the hardest chord change in the song and practice it 20 times in a row. Use the one-minute change exercise from Chapter 2: set a timer for one minute and count how many clean transitions you can make. Aim for 30+ changes per minute before moving on.

Add the Rhythm

Choose a strumming or fingerpicking pattern that suits the song's feel. Play through the entire chord progression at a slow tempo with the chosen pattern. Use a metronome and only increase speed when you can play the full progression without hesitation.

Add Vocals

Start by humming the melody over your chords—this separates the pitch task from the lyric task. Then add words one section at a time, starting with the chorus (it usually repeats most and is easiest to memorize). Don't try to sing the whole song at once.

Polish and Perform

Play the complete song at the target tempo. Record yourself and listen back, focusing on section transitions and timing consistency. Run through the song 3 times in a row without stopping—if you make a mistake, keep going as you would in a live performance.

Tip: Don't learn the whole song in one sitting. Day 1: structure and chords. Day 2: transitions. Day 3: rhythm. Day 4: vocals. Day 5: perform. Spreading the work across several days lets your muscle memory consolidate overnight.

Exercise 12.1: Five-Day Song Challenge

Choose a song with 3–4 chords. Follow the six steps above over five days, spending 15–20 minutes per day. By the end of the week, perform the song from memory for a friend or record it.

12.7 Developing Your Ear

Technical skill and music theory are powerful, but your **ear** is what connects them to real music. Developing your listening skills will help you learn songs faster, improvise confidently, and play with other musicians.

Interval Recognition

Start by learning to recognize the distance between two notes:

Minor 2nd: Tense, dissonant—think "Jaws" theme

Major 2nd: A whole step—first two notes of a major scale

Minor 3rd: Sad quality—beginning of "Greensleeves"

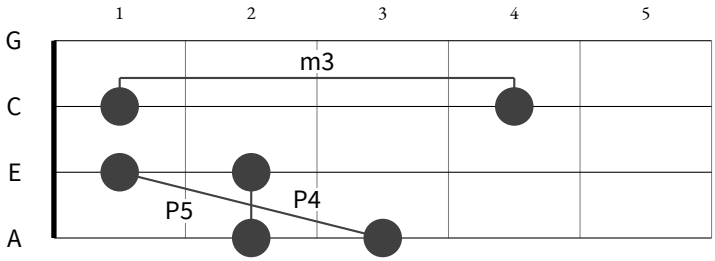
Major 3rd: Bright, happy—first two notes of "Kumbaya"

Perfect 4th: Strong, open—"Here Comes the Bride"

Perfect 5th: Powerful—"Twinkle Twinkle Little Star"

Exercise 12.2: Interval Training

1. Play any note on your ukulele
2. Sing that note, then sing the interval above it
3. Play the second note to check yourself
4. Start with 5ths (easiest), then 4ths, 3rds, and 2nds



Common intervals mapped on the ukulele fretboard.

Recognizing Chord Quality

Train yourself to distinguish chord types by their emotional character:

- **Major:** Bright, happy, resolved
- **Minor:** Dark, sad, introspective
- **Dominant 7th:** Bluesy, wants to resolve
- **Major 7th:** Dreamy, sophisticated
- **Minor 7th:** Mellow, jazzy

Exercise 12.3: Chord Quality Quiz

Have a friend (or use an app) play random chords while you look away. Identify whether each chord is major, minor, or seventh. Start with just major vs. minor, then add seventh chords.

Finding the Key of a Song

To find a song's key by ear:

1. **Find the "home" chord:** Play along until you find the chord that feels most resolved—like the song could end there. This is usually the I chord.
2. **Identify major or minor:** Does the home chord sound bright (major key) or dark (minor key)?
3. **Match the root note:** Hum the root of the home chord, then find that note on your ukulele. That's your key.
4. **Test with the scale:** Play the major (or minor) scale starting on that note. If it sounds "right" with the song, you've found the key.

The V-I Trick: Listen for the chord progression that creates the strongest sense of resolution. When you hear tension release to "home," you've found the V chord moving to the I chord. The I chord names your key.

Playing Melodies by Ear

1. **Start simple:** Begin with songs you know well—nursery rhymes, simple folk songs
2. **Find the first note:** Hum it, then hunt for it on the fretboard
3. **Work phrase by phrase:** Learn 4–8 notes at a time, not the whole song
4. **Listen for patterns:** Melodies often move by steps (adjacent notes) or repeat phrases
5. **Use the pentatonic scale:** Many simple melodies stick close to these five notes—try playing within the pentatonic pattern from Chapter 11, moving it up or down the neck so its root matches the song's key

Exercise 12.4: Learn a Song by Ear

Choose a simple song you know well (a nursery rhyme or folk song). Without looking up the notes:

1. Find the key by locating the "home" note
2. Work out the melody one phrase at a time
3. Add chords once you have the melody

This may take 15–30 minutes for your first song. With practice, you'll get faster.

Daily Ear Training Routine

Combine the skills above into a focused 10-minute daily routine:

1. **Interval singing (2 min):** Pick a random note on your ukulele. Sing a specific interval above it (start with perfect 5ths, then vary the interval each day). Play the target note to check yourself. Repeat 5–6 times.

2. **Chord quality identification (3 min):** Without looking at your fretting hand, form a random chord shape and guess whether it is major, minor, or seventh before strumming. Strum to check. Repeat with different shapes.

3. **Melody dictation (3 min):** Listen to a short phrase from a song (4–8 notes). Pause the recording and play the phrase back on your ukulele. Replay the recording to check. Work one phrase at a time.

4. **Chord progression spotting (2 min):** Play any song you are currently listening to. Identify just the first two chords. Over time, extend to three chords, then four.

Tip: Keep a small notebook of chord progressions you have worked out by ear. Reviewing your past successes builds confidence and reveals patterns—you will start to notice that many songs share the same progressions.

12.8 Summary

Effective practice, thoughtful troubleshooting, and attention to musicality transform playing from mechanical to meaningful. Performance brings your music to life and shares it with others. A systematic approach to learning songs and training your ear turns new material into familiar ground faster. The journey never ends—there's always more to learn, new styles to explore, and deeper expression to achieve.

Practice Routine:

1. Design your ideal practice routine using the session structure
2. Identify your biggest technical weakness and create an exercise to address it
3. Play a song focusing only on dynamics and expression
4. Set three musical goals for the next month
5. Try the 30-day structured practice plan in Appendix E

Milestone: What You Can Do Now

By completing this part, you have achieved the following skills:

- Play jazz voicings including sixth, ninth, and add9 chords
- Execute fingerstyle patterns with independence between thumb and fingers
- Understand music theory: scales, modes, chord construction, circle of fifths
- Improvise melodies using pentatonic scales
- Perform confidently with proper stage presence and audience engagement
- Design effective practice routines for continued growth

Part IV

Songbook

Chapter 13

Beginner Songs

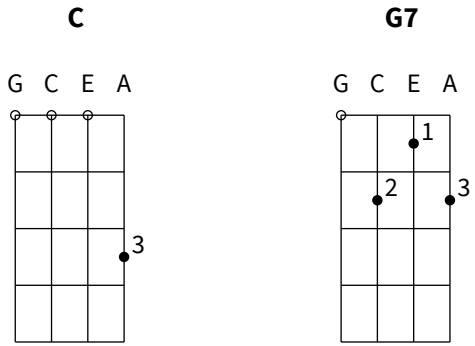
This chapter contains songs using 2–3 simple chords. Perfect for those just starting out.

How to Use This Songbook: Each song shows the chords used at the top, followed by the lyrics with chord changes marked. Strum once per chord change at first, then add strumming patterns from Chapter 3 or Appendix B as you become comfortable.

Row, Row, Row Your Boat

Chords used: C, G7

Key: C Major *Tempo: Moderate*



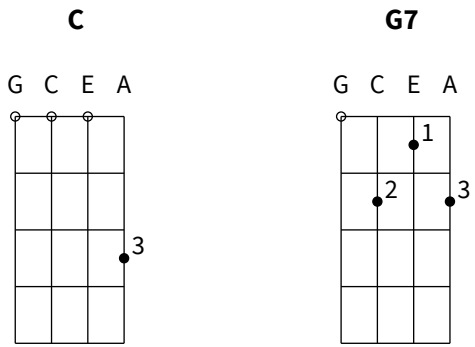
[C] Row, row, row your boat,
Gently down the stream.
[G7] Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
[C] Life is but a dream.

This traditional round is the perfect first song. Try singing while you play!

Buffalo Gals

Chords used: C, G7

Key: C Major *Tempo: Upbeat*



Chorus:

[C] Buffalo gals, won't you come out tonight,
[G7] Come out tonight, come out tonight?
[C] Buffalo gals, won't you come out tonight,
And **[G7]** dance by the light of the **[C]** moon?

Verse:

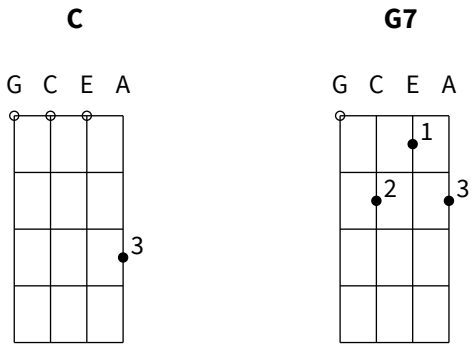
[C] I danced with a gal with a hole in her stocking,
And her **[G7]** hip kept a-rocking and her toe kept a-knocking,
I **[C]** danced with a gal with a hole in her stocking,
And we **[G7]** danced by the light of the **[C]** moon.

This American minstrel song, first published in 1844, is perfect for practicing the two-chord C–G7 change with an upbeat tempo.

Tom Dooley

Chords used: C, G7

Key: C Major Tempo: Moderate folk tempo



Chorus:

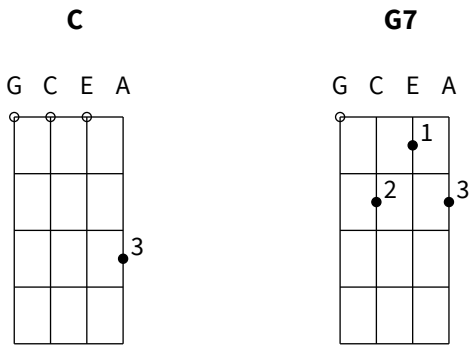
[G7] Hang down your head, Tom Dooley,
Hang down your head and **[C]** cry.
[G7] Hang down your head, Tom Dooley,
Poor boy, you're bound to **[C]** die.

This Appalachian murder ballad from the 1860s became a worldwide hit for the Kingston Trio in 1958. Only two chords—perfect for building confidence with smooth C–G7 changes.

Skip to My Lou

Chords used: C, G7

Key: C Major Tempo: Lively



[C] Skip, skip, skip to my Lou,
[G7] Skip, skip, skip to my Lou,
[C] Skip, skip, skip to my Lou,
[G7] Skip to my Lou, my **[C]** darling.

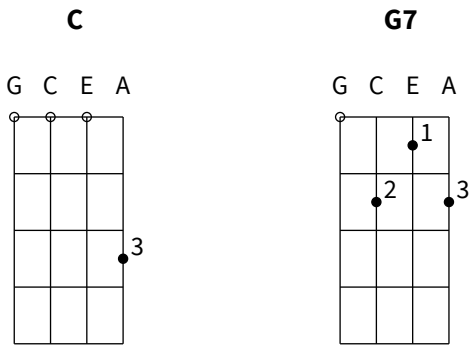
[C] Lost my partner, what'll I do?
[G7] Lost my partner, what'll I do?
[C] Lost my partner, what'll I do?
[G7] Skip to my Lou, my **[C]** darling.

This American play-party song from the 1840s was originally a partner-stealing dance game. The repetitive two-chord structure makes it ideal for sing-along strumming.

He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands

Chords used: C, G7

Key: C Major *Tempo: Gospel feel*



He’s got the **[C]** whole world in His hands,
He’s got the **[G7]** whole world in His hands,
He’s got the **[C]** whole world in His hands,
He’s got the **[G7]** whole world in His **[C]** hands.

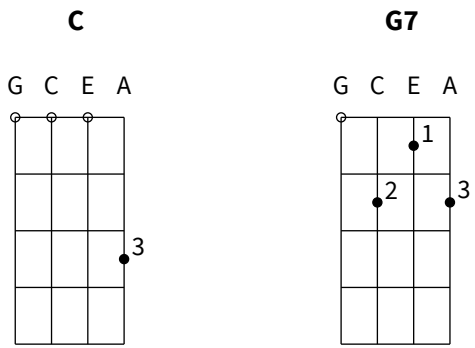
He’s got the **[C]** little tiny baby in His hands,
He’s got the **[G7]** little tiny baby in His hands,
He’s got the **[C]** little tiny baby in His hands,
He’s got the **[G7]** whole world in His **[C]** hands.

This African American spiritual has a simple two-chord pattern that lets you focus on developing a steady, confident gospel rhythm. Try adding emphasis on beat 1.

Down in the Valley

Chords used: C, G7

Key: C Major (3/4 time) *Tempo: Waltz tempo*



[C] Down in the valley, valley so low,
Hang your head **[G7]** over, hear the wind blow.
Hear the wind blow, dear, hear the wind blow,
Hang your head **[C]** over, hear the wind blow.

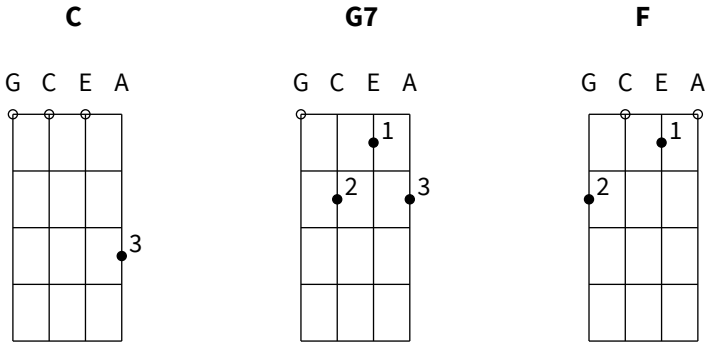
Tip: This song is in 3/4 (waltz) time. Use the waltz pattern from Chapter 3: count "1-2-3, 1-2-3" and strum on each beat.

Also known as "Birmingham Jail," this traditional Appalachian folk song lets you practice that waltz pattern with just two chords.

Camptown Races

Chords used: C, G7, F

Key: C Major Tempo: Lively



Verse:

[C] Camptown ladies sing this song, **[G7]** doo-dah, doo-dah,
[C] Camptown racetrack five miles long, **[G7]** oh, doo-dah **[C]** day.
[C] I come down there with my hat caved in, **[G7]** doo-dah, doo-dah,
[C] I go back home with a pocket full of tin, **[G7]** oh, doo-dah **[C]** day.

Chorus:

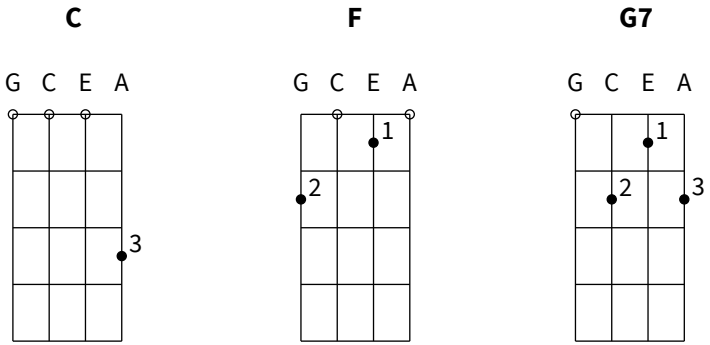
[F] Goin' to run all **[C]** night, **[F]** goin' to run all **[C]** day,
I'll **[C]** bet my money on a bob-tailed nag, **[G7]** somebody bet on the **[C]** bay.

Written by Stephen Foster in 1850, this lively folk song adds the F chord to your C–G7 practice.

Kumbaya

Chords used: C, F, G7

Key: C Major Tempo: Slow, peaceful



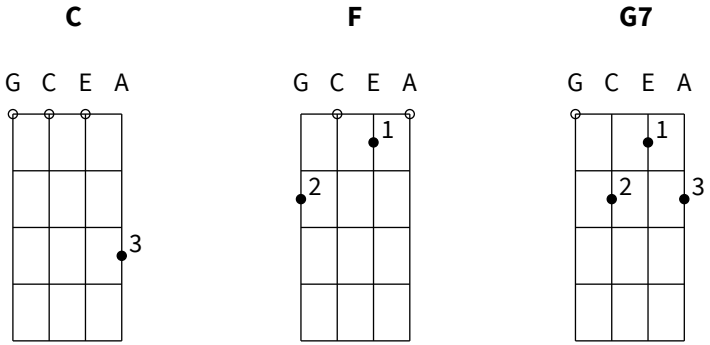
[C] Kumbaya, my Lord, **[F]** kumba**[C]**ya,
Kumbaya, my Lord, **[G7]** kumbaya,
[C] Kumbaya, my Lord, **[F]** kumba**[C]**ya,
[G7] Oh, **[F]** Lord, **[G7]** kumba**[C]**ya.

This spiritual of Gullah origin means "come by here." The gentle C–F–G7 changes give it a peaceful, swaying feel.

Amazing Grace

Chords used: C, F, G7

Key: C Major (3/4 time) *Tempo: Hymn tempo*



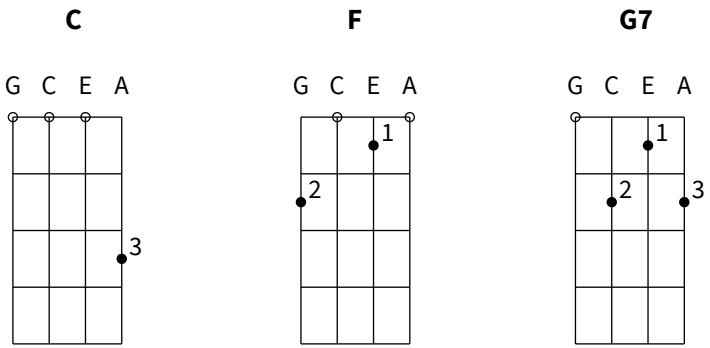
A**[C]**mazing grace, how **[F]** sweet the **[C]** sound,
That saved a wretch like **[G7]** me.
I **[C]** once was lost, but **[F]** now am **[C]** found,
Was blind, but **[G7]** now I **[C]** see.

Written by John Newton in 1772, this beloved hymn is another great waltz (3/4 time). The slow tempo gives you plenty of time to navigate the three-chord changes.

Oh! Susanna

Chords used: C, F, G7

Key: C Major Tempo: Upbeat



Verse:

I **[C]** come from Alabama with a banjo on my **[G7]** knee,
I'm **[C]** going to Louisiana, my true love **[G7]** for to **[C]** see.
It **[C]** rained all night the day I left, the weather it was **[G7]** dry,
The **[C]** sun so hot I froze to death, Susanna, **[G7]** don't you **[C]** cry.

Chorus:

[F] Oh! Susanna, **[C]** don't you cry for **[G7]** me,
I **[C]** come from Alabama with a banjo **[G7]** on my **[C]** knee.

Written by Stephen Foster in 1848, this classic American folk song is a natural ukulele sing-along. The upbeat tempo is great for practicing confident strumming with three chords.

Chapter 14

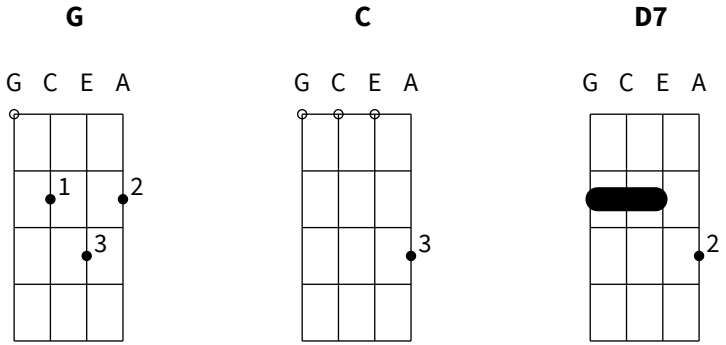
Intermediate Songs

Most of these songs use four or more chords, and a few use more challenging shapes. They'll help you develop fluent chord transitions.

Red River Valley

Chords used: G, C, D7

Key: G Major Tempo: Moderate folk ballad



Verse 1:

From this **[G]** valley they say you are **[D7]** going,
We will miss your bright eyes and sweet **[G]** smile,
For they say you are taking the **[C]** sunshine,
That has **[G]** brightened our **[D7]** path for a **[G]** while.

Chorus:

Come and **[G]** sit by my side if you **[D7]** love me,
Do not hasten to bid me a**[G]**dieu,

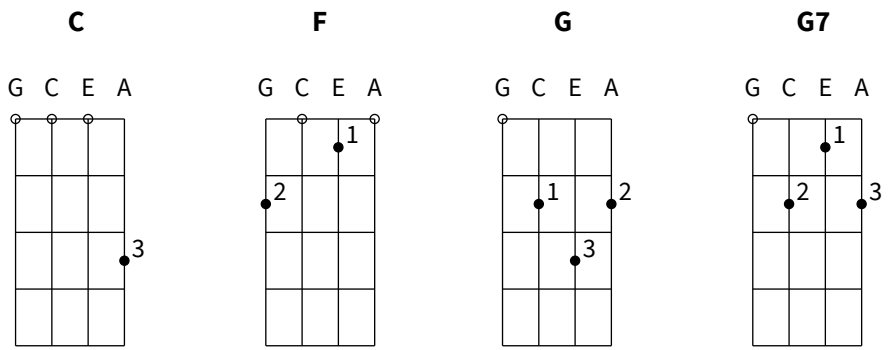
Just remember the Red River **[C]** Valley,
And the **[G]** one who has **[D7]** loved you so **[G]** true.

This traditional folk ballad from the 1890s is perfect for practicing smooth chord changes between G, C, and D7.

Sloop John B

Chords used: C, F, G, G7

Key: C Major Tempo: Moderate



Verse:

We **[C]** come on the Sloop John B, my grandfather and me,
Around Nassau town we did **[G]** roam.
Drinking all **[C]** night, **[F]** got into a fight,
Well I **[C]** feel so broke up, **[G7]** I wanna go **[C]** home.

Chorus:

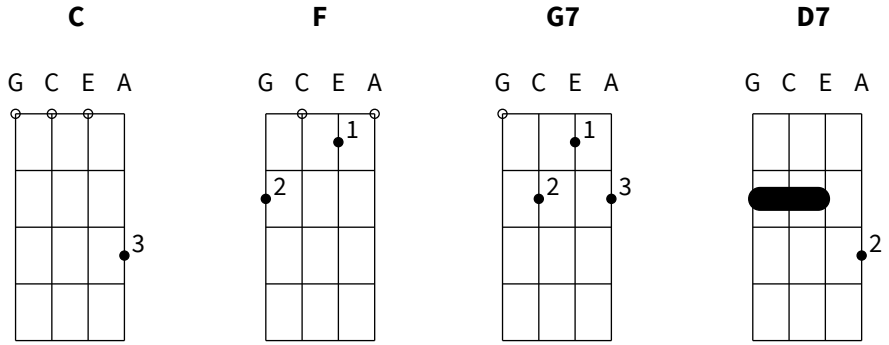
So **[C]** hoist up the John B's sail,
See how the mainsail **[G]** sets,
Call for the captain a**[C]**shore, let me go **[F]** home.
Let me go **[C]** home, I wanna go **[G]** home,
Well I **[C]** feel so broke up, **[G7]** I wanna go **[C]** home.

This traditional Bahamian folk song was popularized by The Beach Boys in 1966. The four-chord progression with natural transitions makes it a satisfying step up from two-chord songs.

I've Been Working on the Railroad

Chords used: C, F, G7, D7

Key: C Major Tempo: March tempo



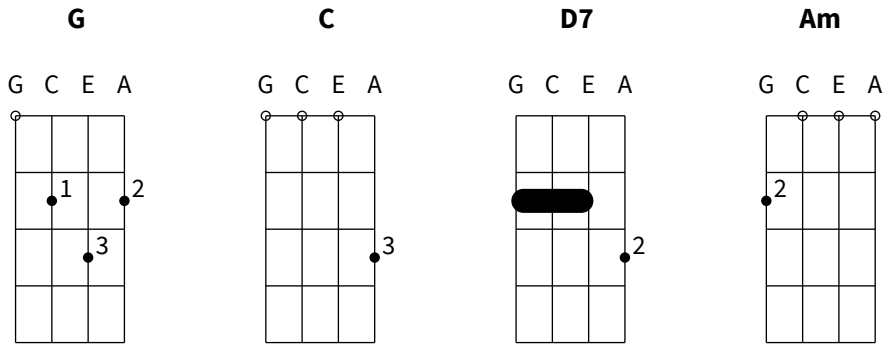
[C] I've been working on the **[F]** railroad,
[C] All the live-long **[G7]** day.
[C] I've been working on the **[F]** railroad,
Just to **[D7]** pass the time a**[G7]**way.
[C] Can't you hear the whistle **[F]** blowing?
[C] Rise up so early in the **[G7]** morn.
[C] Can't you hear the captain **[F]** shouting,
[C] "Di**[G7]**nah, blow your **[C]** horn!"

This traditional American folk song from the 1890s uses four chords at a march tempo—good practice for keeping steady time while managing frequent chord changes.

Home on the Range

Chords used: G, C, D7, Am

Key: G Major (3/4 time) *Tempo: Waltz tempo*



Verse:

Oh, **[G]** give me a home where the **[C]** buffalo roam,
Where the **[G]** deer and the **[D7]** antelope play,
Where **[G]** seldom is heard a dis**[C]**couraging word,
And the **[G]** skies are not **[D7]** cloudy all **[G]** day.

Chorus:

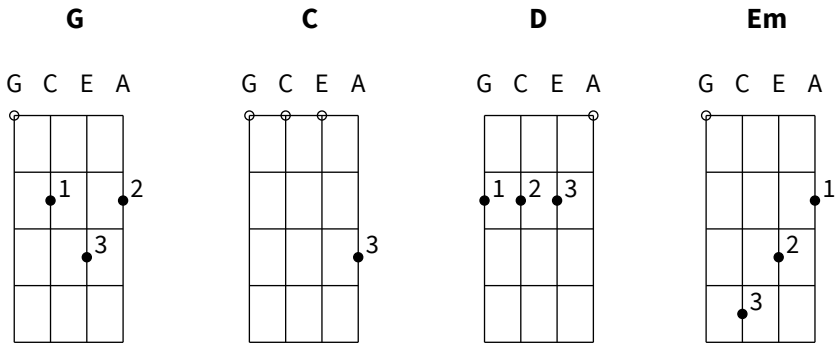
[G] Home, home on the **[Am]** range,
Where the **[G]** deer and the **[D7]** antelope play,
Where **[G]** seldom is heard a dis**[C]**couraging word,
And the **[G]** skies are not **[D7]** cloudy all **[G]** day.

This classic American western folk song became the state song of Kansas. It's in 3/4 waltz time—count "1-2-3" and strum on beat 1.

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

Chords used: G, C, D, Em

Key: G Major Tempo: Slow spiritual



Chorus:

[G] Swing low, sweet **[C]** chari**[G]**ot,
Coming for to carry me **[D]** home,
[G] Swing low, sweet **[C]** chari**[G]**ot,
Coming for to **[D]** carry me **[G]** home.

Verse:

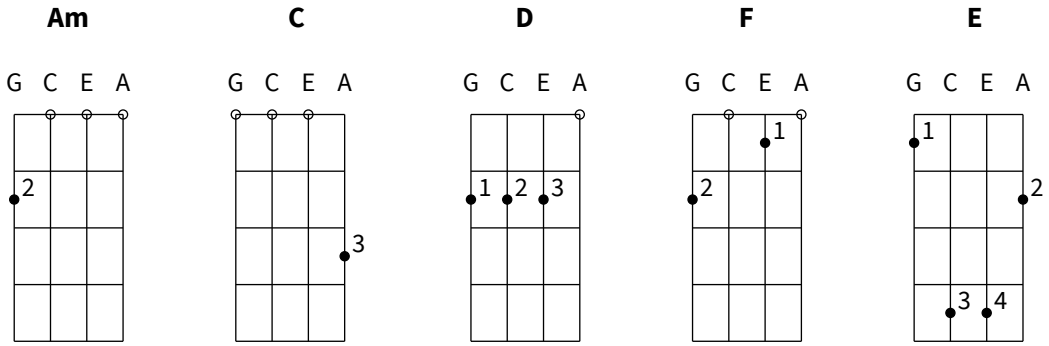
I **[G]** looked over Jordan and **[C]** what did I **[G]** see,
Coming for to carry me **[D]** home?
A **[G]** band of **[Em]** angels **[C]** coming after **[G]** me,
Coming for to **[D]** carry me **[G]** home.

This African American spiritual is the first song in the songbook to use the Em chord—its minor color adds emotional depth to your playing.

House of the Rising Sun

Chords used: Am, C, D, F, E

Key: A Minor (6/8 time) *Tempo: Slow, dramatic*



[Am] There **[C]** is a **[D]** house in **[F]** New Orleans,
They **[Am]** call the **[C]** Rising **[E]** Sun,
And it's **[Am]** been the **[C]** ruin of **[D]** many a poor **[F]** boy,
And **[Am]** God, I **[E]** know I'm **[Am]** one.

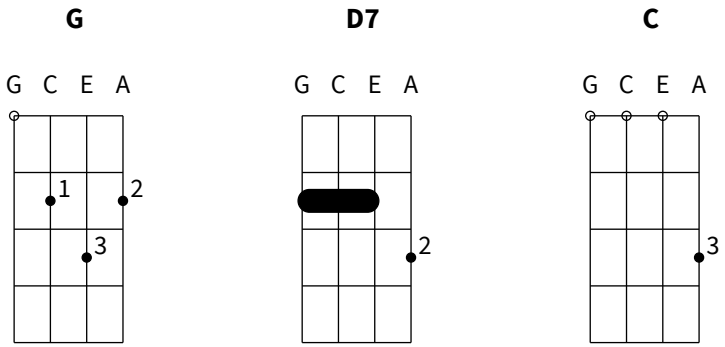
Tip: This song uses a fingerpicking arpeggio pattern. Try: p-i-m-a-m-i for each chord.

This traditional American folk song was popularized by The Animals in 1964. The five-chord minor-key progression and 6/8 time make it a rewarding challenge.

When the Saints Go Marching In

Chords used: G, D7, C

Key: G Major *Tempo: Upbeat jazz/spiritual*



Verse 1:

Oh, when the **[G]** saints go marching in,
Oh, when the saints go marching **[D7]** in,
Oh Lord, I want to **[G]** be in that **[C]** number,
When the **[G]** saints go **[D7]** marching **[G]** in.

Verse 2:

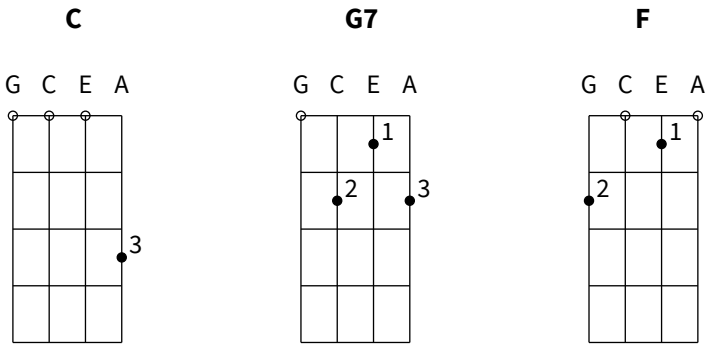
Oh, when the **[G]** sun refuse to shine,
Oh, when the sun refuse to **[D7]** shine,
Oh Lord, I want to **[G]** be in that **[C]** number,
When the **[G]** sun re**[D7]**fuse to **[G]** shine.

This traditional jazz and gospel standard is great for practicing confident strumming with a swing feel.

Clementine

Chords used: C, G7, F

Key: C Major (3/4 time) *Tempo: Waltz tempo*



Verse 1:

In a **[C]** cavern, in a canyon, excavating for a **[G7]** mine,
Dwelt a miner, forty-niner, and his daughter Clemen**[C]**tine.

Chorus:

Oh my **[C]** darling, oh my darling, oh my **[F]** darling Clemen**[C]**tine,
You are lost and gone for**[G7]**ever, dreadful sorry, Clemen**[C]**tine.

Verse 2:

Light she **[C]** was, and like a fairy, and her shoes were number **[G7]** nine,
Herring boxes without topses, sandals were for Clemen**[C]**tine.

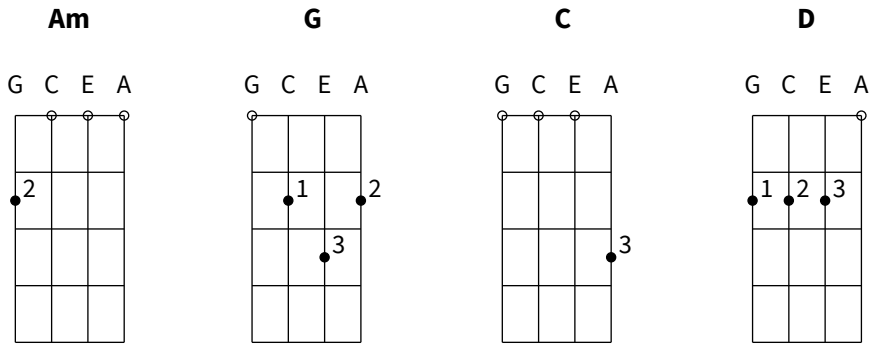
Tip: This song is in 3/4 (waltz) time. Practice counting "1-2-3, 1-2-3" while strumming down on each beat.

Written by Percy Montrose around 1884, this humorous ballad is a folk classic. The waltz rhythm gives it a lilting feel that pairs naturally with the ukulele.

Scarborough Fair

Chords used: Am, G, C, D

Key: A Dorian (3/4 time) *Tempo: Slow, modal folk*



Verse 1:

[Am] Are you going to **[G]** Scarborough **[Am]** Fair?
[C] Parsley, **[Am]** sage, rose**[D]**mary and **[Am]** thyme,
Remember **[C]** me to **[G]** one who lives **[Am]** there,
[G] She once **[Am]** was a true love of **[G]** mine. **[Am]**

Verse 2:

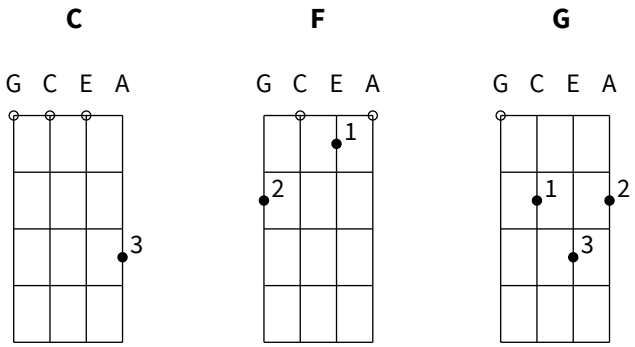
[Am] Tell her to make me a **[G]** cambric **[Am]** shirt,
[C] Parsley, **[Am]** sage, rose**[D]**mary and **[Am]** thyme,
Without no **[C]** seams nor **[G]** needle**[Am]**work,
[G] Then she'll **[Am]** be a true love of **[G]** mine. **[Am]**

This traditional English ballad uses a modal (Dorian) sound centered on Am. Practice the minor key chord changes.

La Bamba

Chords used: C, F, G

Key: C Major Tempo: Fast, energetic



Chorus:

[C] Para bailar La **[F]** Bamba, **[G]**
[C] Para bailar La **[F]** Bamba se nece**[G]**sita
Una poca de **[C]** gracia, **[F]** **[G]**
Una poca de **[C]** gracia para **[F]** mi para **[G]** ti,
Ay arriba y a**[C]**rriba, **[F]** **[G]**
Ay arriba y a**[C]**rriba, por **[F]** ti seré, por **[G]** ti seré.

Refrain:

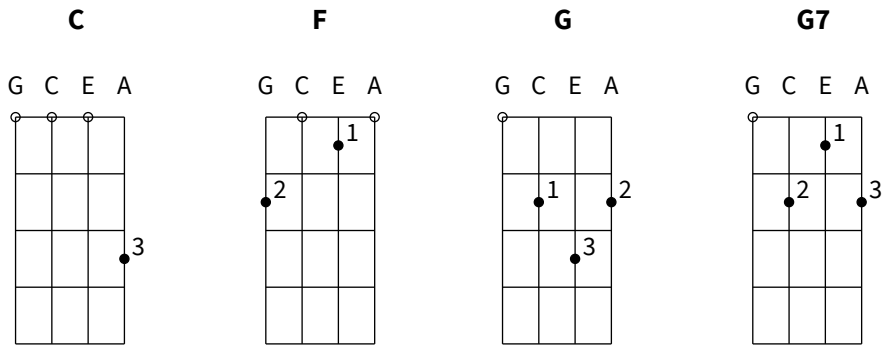
[C] Bamba, **[F]** bamba! **[G]**
[C] Bamba, **[F]** bamba! **[G]**

This traditional Mexican folk song became a rock hit in the 1950s. The entire song uses just three chords in a repeating pattern—perfect for practicing fast chord changes.

Cielito Lindo

Chords used: C, F, G, G7

Key: C Major (3/4 time) *Tempo: Waltz, romantic*



Verse:

De la Sierra Mo**[C]**rena, Cielito Lindo,
Vienen ba**[G7]**jando,
Un par de ojitos **[G7]** negros, Cielito Lindo,
De contra**[C]**bando.

Chorus:

[F] Ay, ay, ay, **[C]** ay,
[G7] Canta y no **[C]** llores,
Porque cantando se a**[G7]**legran, Cielito Lindo,
Los cora**[C]**zones.

This beloved Mexican song from 1882 is sung at celebrations worldwide. The waltz rhythm (3/4 time) gives it a swaying, romantic feel.

Chapter 15

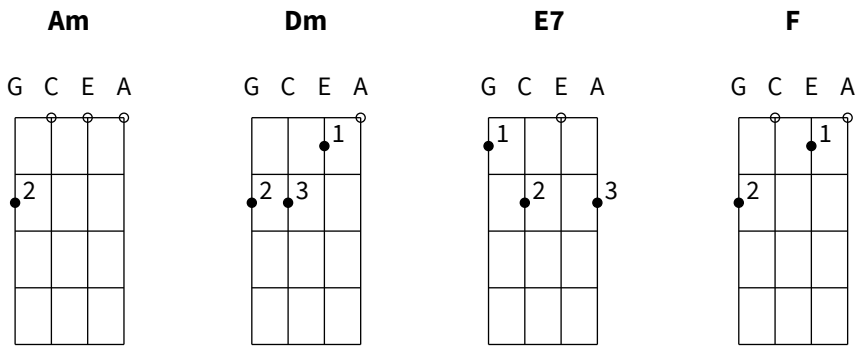
Advanced Songs

These songs use minor keys, seventh chords, new rhythms, and fingerpicking across jazz, blues, folk, and international styles. They'll push your skills to the next level.

St. James Infirmary

Chords used: Am, Dm, E7, F

Key: A Minor Tempo: Slow jazz/blues



I went **[Am]** down to **[Dm]** St. James In**[Am]**firmary,
To see my **[E7]** baby **[Am]** there,
She was **[Dm]** lying on a long white **[Am]** table,
So **[F]** sweet, so **[E7]** cold, so **[Am]** fair.

Let her go, let her go, **[Dm]** God bless **[Am]** her,
Wherever she may **[E7]** be,
She can **[Am]** search this **[Dm]** whole wide **[Am]** world over,
She'll **[F]** never find a **[E7]** man like **[Am]** me.

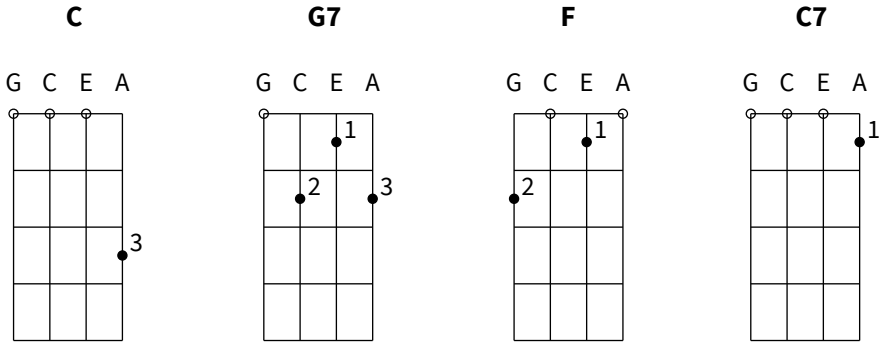
Tip: Practice the Am-Dm-E7 minor-key progression (i–iv–V7) until the changes feel automatic.

Dating to the early 1900s and famously recorded by Louis Armstrong, this jazz and blues standard is one of the great minor-key songs. The Am–Dm–E7 progression (i–iv–V7) is a staple of minor-key jazz and blues.

Careless Love

Chords used: C, G7, F, C7

Key: C Major Tempo: Slow blues/jazz



[C] Love, oh love, oh **[G7]** careless love,
[C] Love, oh love, oh **[C7]** careless **[F]** love,
[C] Love, oh **[G7]** love, oh care**[C]**less love,
You **[F]** see what **[G7]** love has done to **[C]** me.

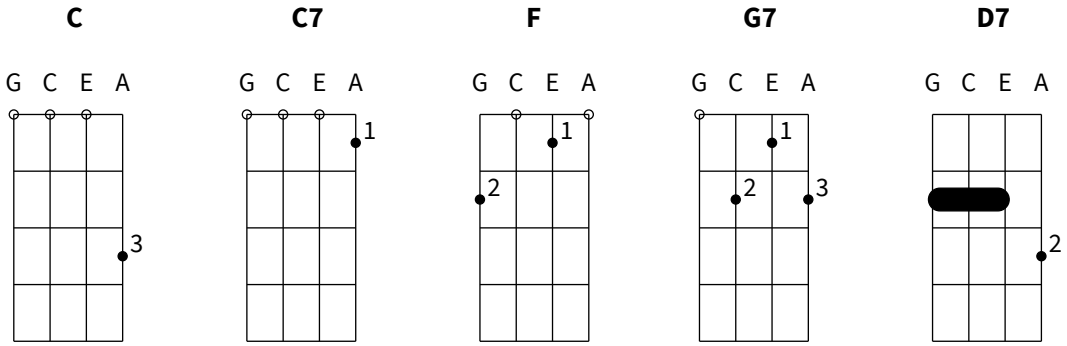
[C] I cried last night and the **[G7]** night before,
[C] Cried last night and the **[C7]** night be**[F]**fore,
[C] Cried last **[G7]** night and the night be**[C]**fore,
Gonna **[F]** cry tonight and **[G7]** cry no **[C]** more.

This traditional jazz and blues ballad was a hit for Bessie Smith in 1925 and has been recorded by countless jazz and blues artists since.

St. Louis Blues

Chords used: C, C7, F, G7, D7

Key: C Major Tempo: Blues shuffle



[C] I hate to see **[C7]** the evening sun go **[F]** down,
[C] I hate to **[C7]** see the evening sun go **[F]** down,
'Cause my **[G7]** baby, he done left this **[C]** town. **[G7]**

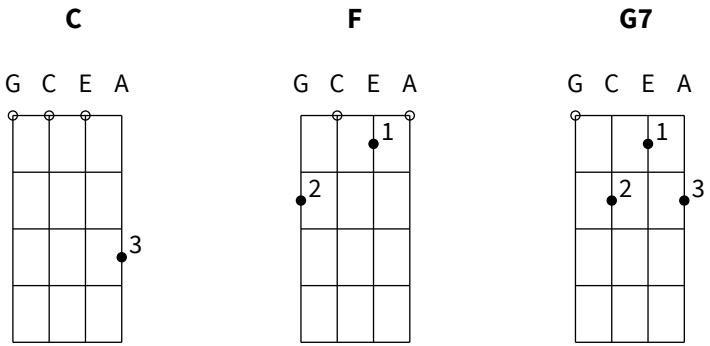
[C] Feelin' tomorrow **[C7]** like I feel to**[F]**day,
[C] Feelin' to**[C7]**morrow like I feel to**[F]**day,
I'll **[D7]** pack my trunk, **[G7]** make my geta**[C]**way.

One of the most famous blues songs ever published, W.C. Handy's 1914 composition introduced the blues to mainstream audiences. The five-chord progression and shuffle rhythm make it a great entry point for blues ukulele.

Frankie and Johnny

Chords used: C, F, G7

Key: C Major Tempo: Blues ballad



[C] Frankie and Johnny were lovers,
[F] Oh, Lordy how they could **[C]** love,
They swore to be true to each other,
True as the **[G7]** stars a**[C]**bove.
He was her **[F]** man, **[C]** but he done her **[G7]** wrong. **[C]**

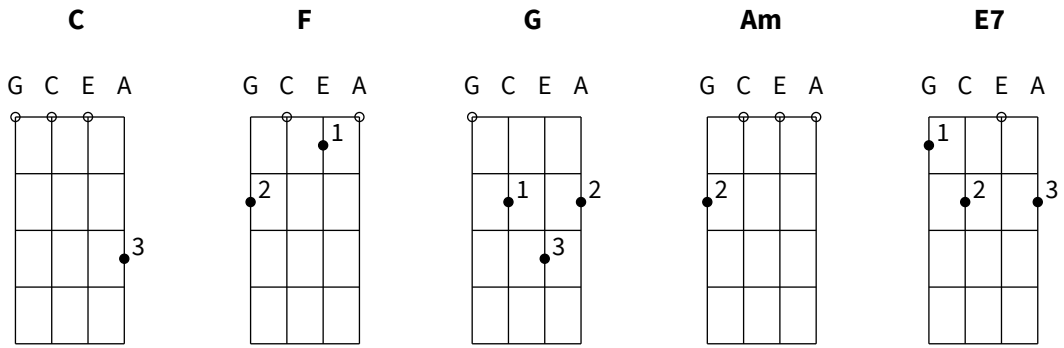
[C] Frankie went down to the corner,
[F] Just for a bucket of **[C]** beer,
She said to the fat bartender,
"Has my **[G7]** Johnny been **[C]** here?
He is my **[F]** man, **[C]** but he's doin' me **[G7]** wrong." **[C]**

This traditional American murder ballad dates back to the 1890s and tells a dramatic story over simple blues changes.

Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen

Chords used: C, F, G, Am, E7

Key: C Major Tempo: Slow spiritual



[C] Nobody knows the **[F]** trouble I've **[C]** seen,
Nobody knows but **[G]** Je**[C]**sus,
[C] Nobody knows the **[F]** trouble I've **[C]** seen,
[G] Glory halle**[C]**lu**[Am]**jah!

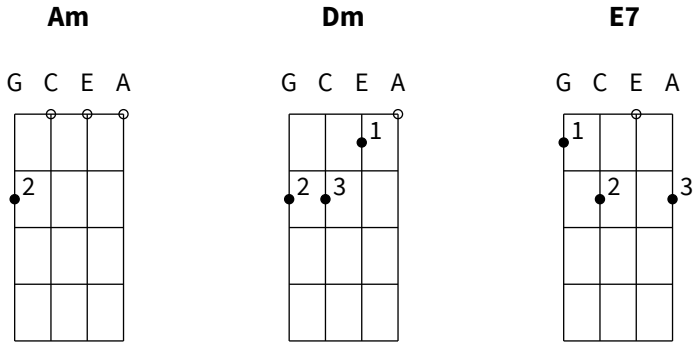
[C] Sometimes I'm up, some**[E7]**times I'm **[Am]** down,
Oh, **[G]** yes, **[C]** Lord!
[C] Sometimes I'm almost **[F]** to the **[C]** ground,
[G] Oh, yes, **[C]** Lord!

This African American spiritual became a jazz standard. Add expressive dynamics—start soft and build to the "Glory" resolution.

Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho

Chords used: Am, Dm, E7

Key: A Minor *Tempo: Upbeat spiritual*



Chorus:

[Am] Joshua fit the battle of **[E7]** Jericho,
[Am] Jericho, **[E7]** Jericho,
[Am] Joshua fit the battle of **[E7]** Jericho,
And the **[Dm]** walls came **[E7]** tumbling **[Am]** down!

Verse:

You may **[Am]** talk about your kings of **[Dm]** Gideon,
You may **[Am]** talk about your men of **[E7]** Saul,
But there's **[Am]** none like good old **[Dm]** Joshua,
At the **[E7]** battle of Jeri**[Am]**cho!

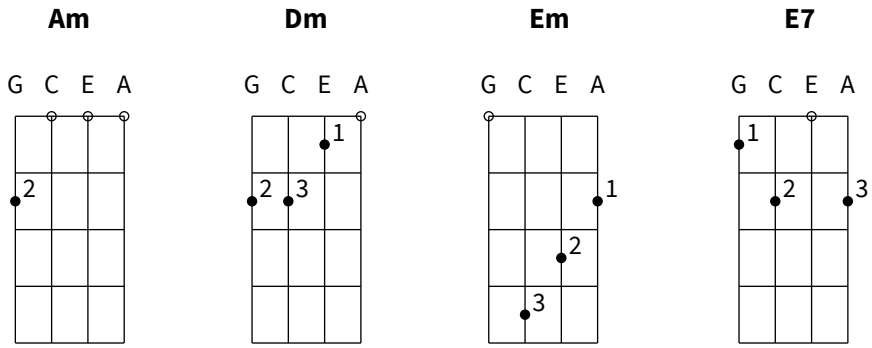
Tip: This driving spiritual in minor key is great for practicing confident rhythm in Am. Accent the downbeats strongly.

This African American spiritual has a call-and-response structure that translates well to solo ukulele. The driving minor-key rhythm and dramatic "walls came tumbling down" refrain make it exciting to perform.

Wayfaring Stranger

Chords used: Am, Dm, Em, E7

Key: A Minor Tempo: Slow, haunting



I am a **[Am]** poor wayfaring stranger,
Traveling **[Dm]** through this world of **[Am]** woe,
But there's no **[Am]** sickness, toil, or danger,
In that bright **[E7]** land to which I **[Am]** go.

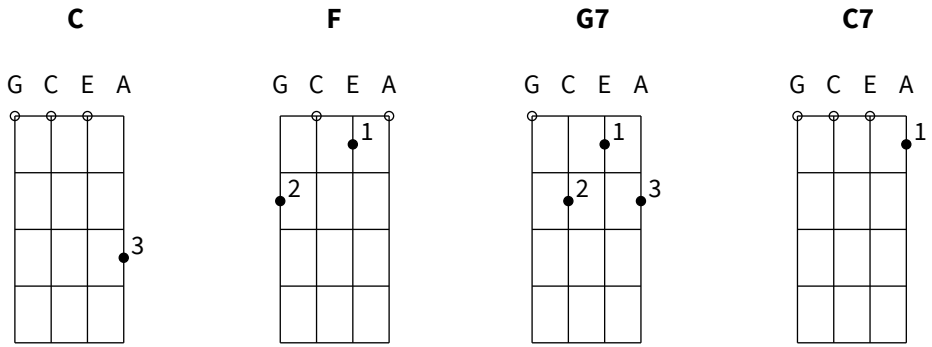
I'm going **[Dm]** there to see my father,
I'm going **[Am]** there no more to roam,
I'm just a**[Em]**going over Jordan,
I'm just a**[E7]**going over **[Am]** home.

This haunting Appalachian folk song dates to the early 1800s. Use fingerpicking for an atmospheric sound.

Aloha ’Oe

Chords used: C, F, G7, C7

Key: C Major (Hawaiian) *Tempo: Slow, expressive*



Chorus:

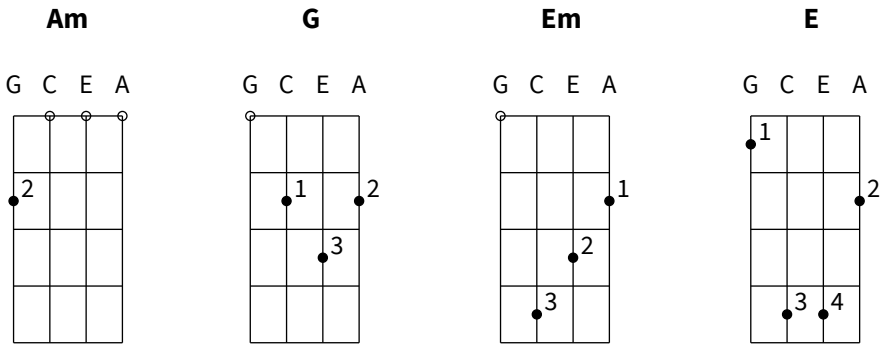
A**[C]**loha ’oe, alo**[F]**ha ’oe,
E ke **[C]** onaona noho i ka **[G7]** lipo.
One **[C]** fond embrace, a **[C7]** ho’i a’e **[F]** au,
Until we **[C]** meet **[G7]** a**[C]**gain.

Written by Queen Lili’uokalani, this is perhaps the most famous Hawaiian song. Use fingerpicking for an authentic sound.

Greensleeves

Chords used: Am, G, Em, E

Key: A Minor (6/8 time) *Tempo: Slow, modal*



Verse:

[Am] Alas, my love, you **[G]** do me wrong,
To **[Am]** cast me off dis**[E]**courteously.
For **[Am]** I have loved you **[G]** well and long,
De**[Em]**lighting in your **[E]** compa**[Am]**ny.

Chorus:

[G] Greensleeves was **[Em]** all my joy,
[Am] Greensleeves was my de**[E]**light,
[G] Greensleeves was my **[Em]** heart of gold,
And **[Am]** who but my lady **[E]** Green**[Am]**sleeves.

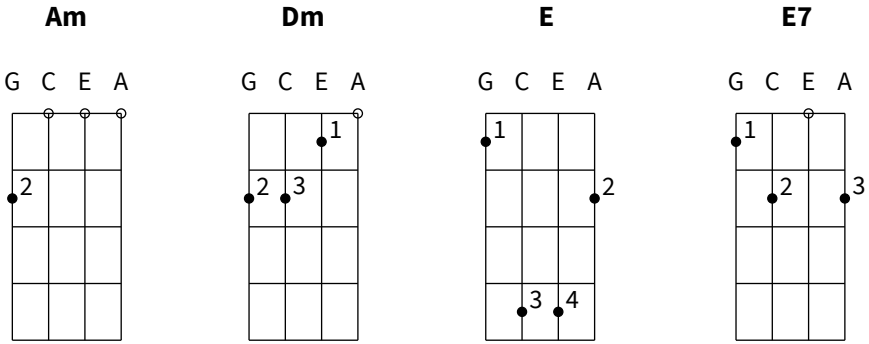
Tip: This English folk song from the 1580s is in 6/8 time. Count "1-2-3, 4-5-6" and try fingerpicking the arpeggios.

This English folk ballad dates to the 1580s and is sometimes attributed to Henry VIII. The modal minor sound and lilting 6/8 meter create a timeless, haunting quality. The E major chord is the raised-7th V chord from the harmonic minor scale (Chapter 11)—it supplies the leading tone that pulls back to Am.

Hava Nagila

Chords used: Am, Dm, E, E7

Key: A Harmonic Minor *Tempo: Fast, celebratory*



Main Theme:

[E7] Hava na**[Am]**gila, hava nagila,
Hava na**[E7]**gila, venis**[Am]**mecha.
[E7] Hava na**[Am]**gila, hava nagila,
Hava na**[E7]**gila, venis**[Am]**mecha.

Bridge:

[Dm] Hava neranena, hava neranena,
Hava nerane**[Am]**na, venismecha.
[Dm] Hava neranena, hava neranena,
Hava nerane**[E7]**na, venis**[Am]**mecha.

Ending (accelerando):

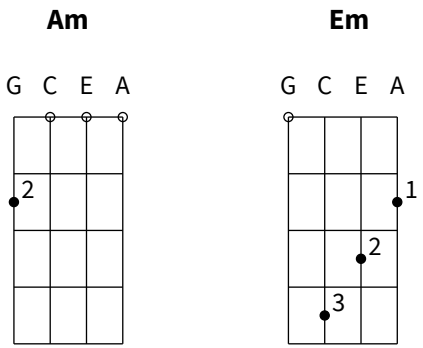
[Am] Uru, uru achim,
[Dm] Uru achim belev sa**[E7]**meach. *(repeat, getting faster)*
[Am] Uru achim, uru achim,
[E] Belev sa**[Am]**meach!

This Israeli folk song is played at celebrations worldwide. It starts slowly and accelerates dramatically to the end—a fun challenge for your tempo control!

Sakura

Chords used: Am, Em

Key: A Minor (Japanese pentatonic) *Tempo: Slow, contemplative*



Verse:

[Am] Sakura, **[Em]** sakura,
[Am] Yayoi no **[Em]** sora wa,
[Am] Mi-watasu ka**[Em]**giri,
[Am] Kasumi ka **[Em]** kumo ka.

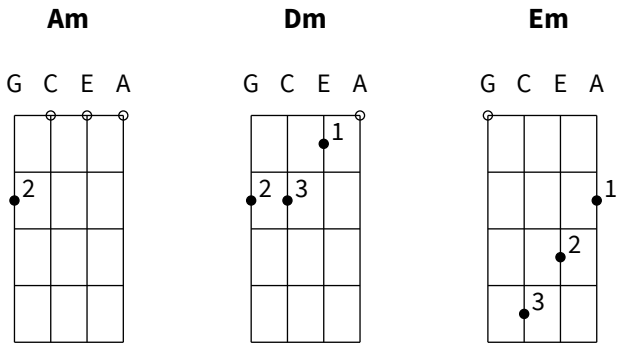
[Am] Asahi ni **[Em]** niou,
[Am] Sakura, **[Em]** sakura,
[Am] Hana **[Em]** za**[Am]**kari.

This traditional Japanese song celebrates cherry blossoms in spring. With only two chords, focus on creating a delicate, flowing sound. Try fingerpicking each chord as an arpeggio.

Arirang

Chords used: Am, Dm, Em

Key: A Minor (3/4 time) *Tempo: Slow, bittersweet*



Chorus:

[Am] Arirang, **[Dm]** Arirang, **[Am]** Arari**[Em]**yo,
[Am] Arirang **[Dm]** gogae-ro **[Em]** neomeo**[Am]**ganda.

Verse:

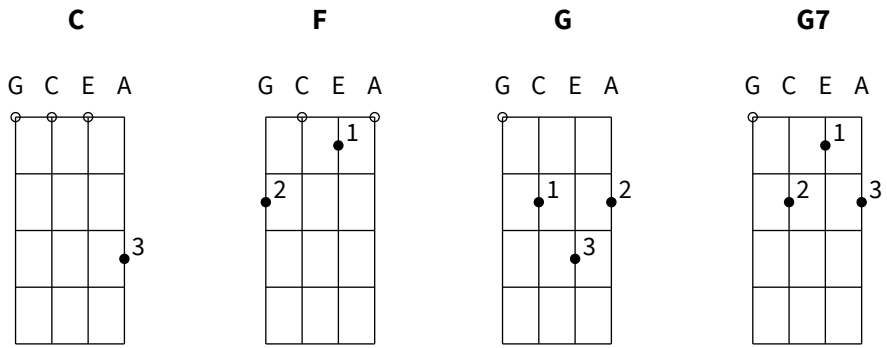
[Am] Na-reul **[Dm]** beorigo **[Am]** gasineun **[Em]** nim-eun,
[Am] Simnido **[Dm]** motgaseo **[Em]** balbyeong**[Am]**nanda.

Korea's most beloved folk song, Arirang tells of a lover crossing a mountain pass. The 3/4 waltz feel and minor key create a beautiful, melancholic mood.

La Cucaracha

Chords used: C, F, G, G7

Key: C Major Tempo: Upbeat, humorous



Chorus:

La cuca**[C]**racha, la cucaracha,
Ya no **[G7]** puede cami**[C]**nar,
Porque no **[F]** tiene, porque le **[C]** falta,
[G7] Una pata para an**[C]**dar.

Verse:

[C] Una cucaracha pinta
[G7] Dijo a una colo**[C]**rada,
Vámonos **[F]** para mi **[C]** tierra,
[G7] A pasar la tempo**[C]**rada.

This humorous Mexican folk song has been popular since the 1800s. The syncopated rhythm and silly lyrics make it a crowd favorite.

Part V

Appendices

Appendix A

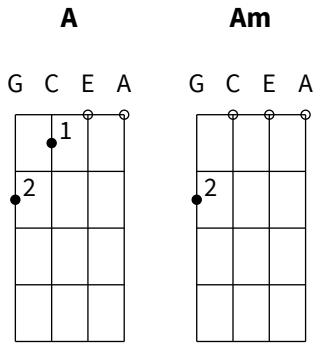
Complete Chord Dictionary

This appendix provides chord diagrams for the most commonly used ukulele chords, organized by root note. All diagrams are for standard GCEA tuning.

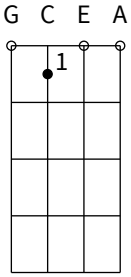
Reading the Diagrams

- Vertical lines represent strings (G-C-E-A from left to right)
- Horizontal lines represent frets
- Dots show finger placement; numbers indicate which finger to use
- Position numbers show which fret the diagram starts from
- "0" above a string means play it open; "X" means don't play it

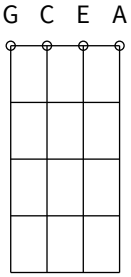
A.1 A Chords



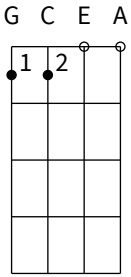
A7



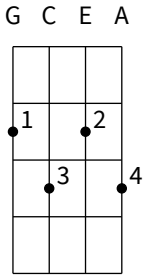
Am7



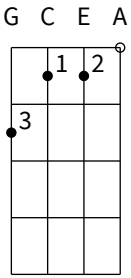
Amaj7



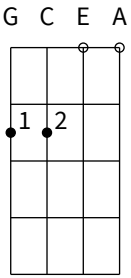
Adim7



Aaug

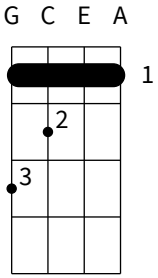


Asus4

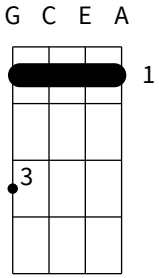


A.2 B♭ / A♯ Chords

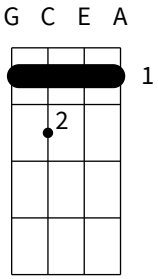
B♭



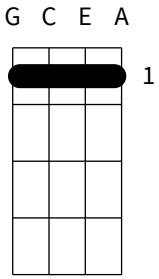
B♭m



B♭7

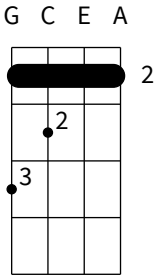


B♭m7

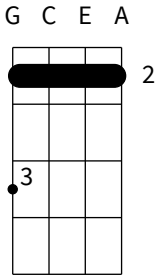


A.3 B Chords

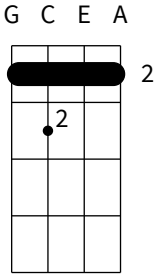
B



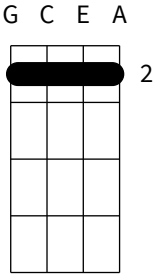
Bm



B7

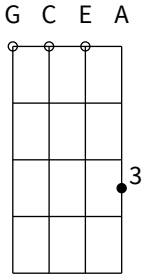


Bm7

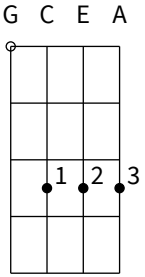


A.4 C Chords

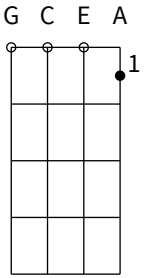
C



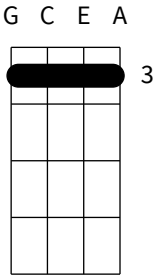
Cm



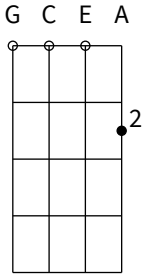
C7



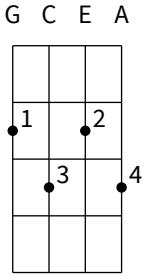
Cm7



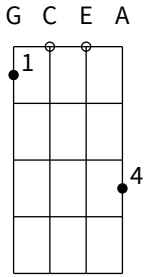
Cmaj7



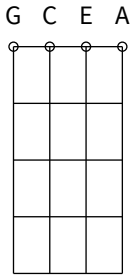
Cdim7



Caug

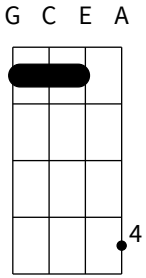


C6

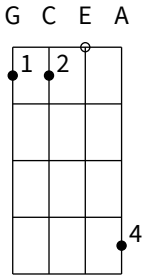


A.5 D♭ / C♯ Chords

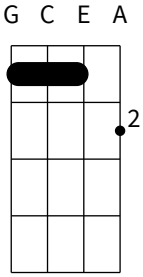
D♭



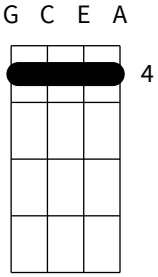
D♭m



D♭7

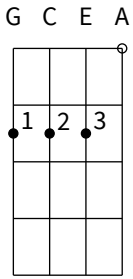


D♭m7

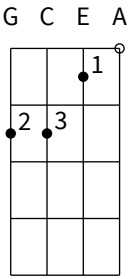


A.6 D Chords

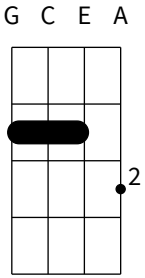
D



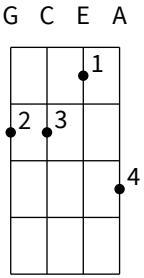
Dm



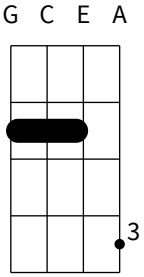
D7



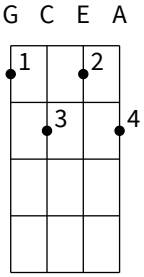
Dm7



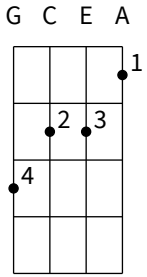
Dmaj7



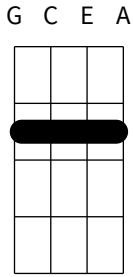
Ddim7



Daug

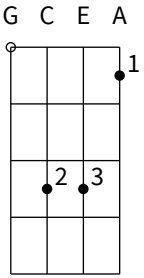


D6

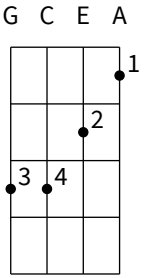


A.7 E♭ / D♯ Chords

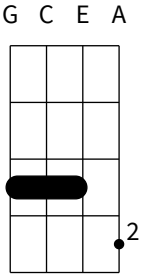
E♭



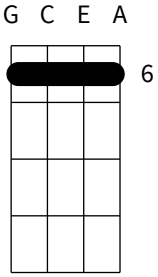
E♭m



E♭7

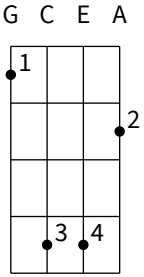


E♭m7

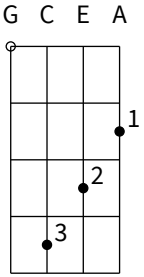


A.8 E Chords

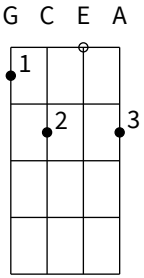
E



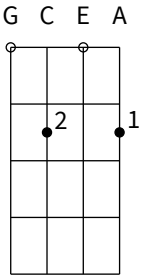
Em



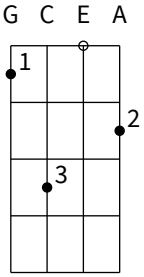
E7



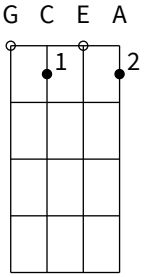
Em7



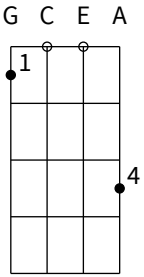
Emaj7



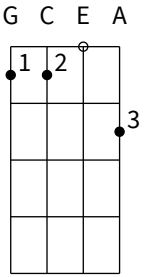
Edim7



Eaug

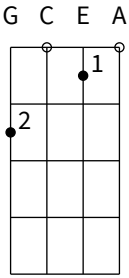


E6

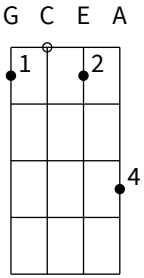


A.9 F Chords

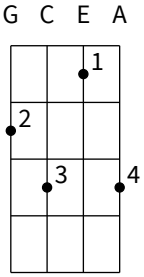
F



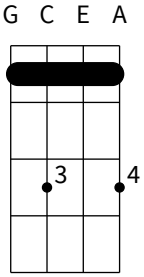
Fm



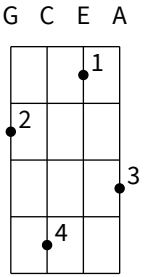
F7



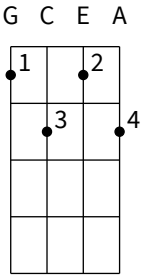
Fm7



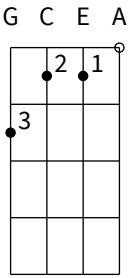
Fmaj7



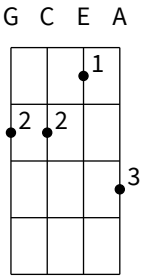
Fdim7



Faug

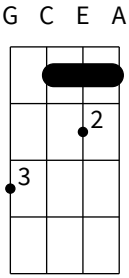


F6

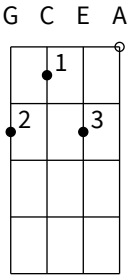


A.10 G♭ / F♯ Chords

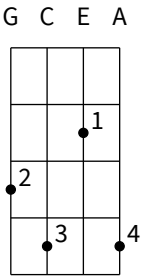
G♭



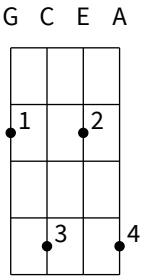
G♭m



G♭7

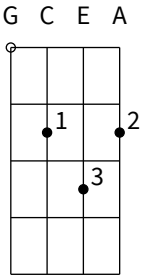


G♭m7

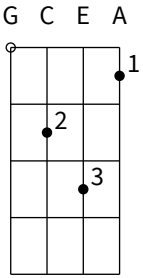


A.11 G Chords

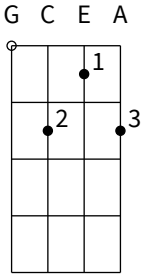
G



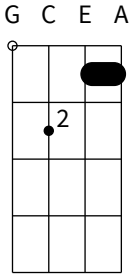
Gm



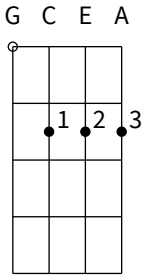
G7



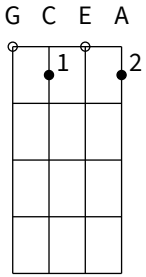
Gm7



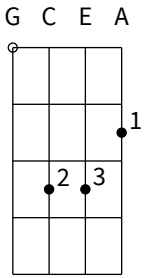
Gmaj7



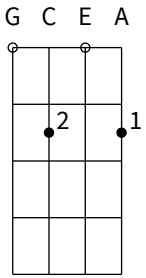
Gdim7



Gaug

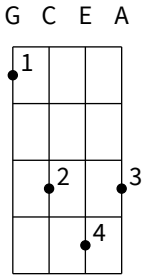


G6

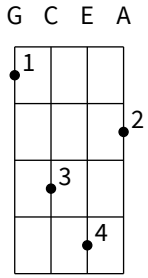


A.12 A♭ / G♯ Chords

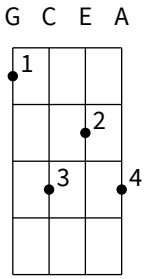
A♭



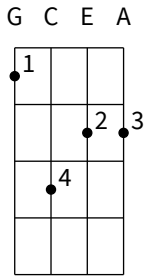
A♭m



A♭7



A♭m7

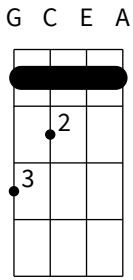


A.13 Moveable Chord Shapes

These shapes can be moved up and down the neck. The root note determines the chord name.

Major Barre Shape (based on A)

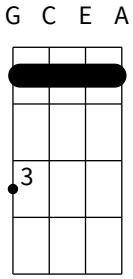
Major



Root on A string. Move to 1st fret = B♭, 2nd fret = B, 3rd fret = C, etc.

Minor Barre Shape (based on Am)

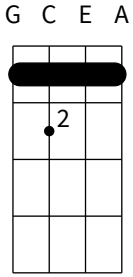
Minor



Root on A string. Move to 1st fret = B♭m, 2nd fret = Bm, 3rd fret = Cm, etc.

Dominant 7th Barre Shape

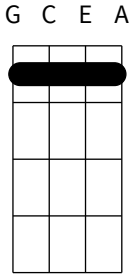
Dom7



Root on A string. Move to 1st fret = B♭7, 2nd fret = B7, 3rd fret = C7, etc.

Minor 7th Barre Shape

Min7



A simple barre with no additional fingers creates the minor 7th sound.

Appendix B

Strumming Pattern Library

This appendix provides a collection of strumming patterns for various musical styles. Practice each pattern slowly until it becomes automatic before applying it to songs.

How to Use This Appendix

Each pattern includes a description of its musical character. As you practice:

- **Listen first**: Search for the pattern name online to hear examples
- **Start slow**: Begin at 50–60 BPM with a metronome
- **Feel the groove**: Focus on the accents and rests that give each style its character

Notation Key

- ↓ = Downstrum
- ↑ = Upstrum
- x = Muted strum (chunk)
- T = Percussive tap
- (↓) = Soft (unaccented) strum
- — = Rest (no strum)
- – = Skipped (unplayed) subdivision
- Parentheses around a beat (e.g., "(3)") mark a beat where no open chord rings—either a rest (the strings are not struck; the hand keeps moving) or a chunk (a muted strum)
- **Bold** = Accented strum
- Numbers indicate beats; "&" indicates the upbeat

B.1 Basic Patterns (4/4 Time)

Pattern 1: All Down

The simplest pattern—great for learning new songs and locking into the beat. *80–120 BPM.*

↓	↓	↓	↓
1	2	3	4

Pattern 2: Down-Up

Alternating strums for a fuller sound. Upstrums should match downstrums in volume to avoid a lopsided feel. *80–120 BPM.*

↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑
1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&

Pattern 3: Folk/Pop Basic

A common pattern for acoustic songs. The down-up on beat 4 propels the rhythm into the next measure. *80–120 BPM.*

↓		↓	↑		↑	↓	↑
1	&	2	&	(3)	&	4	&

B.2 Island/Calypso Patterns

These patterns have a relaxed, swaying feel. The muted "chunk" creates the signature Hawaiian groove that makes you think of sunny beaches.

Classic Island Strum

The quintessential ukulele pattern—often called "Old Faithful" because it fits nearly any 4/4 song. The chunk on beat 3 creates a syncopated lift that gives the pattern its relaxed, swaying feel. Heard in "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" (Israel Kamakawiwoʻole) and "Riptide" (Vance Joy). *90–130 BPM.*

↓		↓	↑	x	↑	↓	↑
1	&	2	&	(3)	&	4	&

Tip: The "chunk" (x) on beat 3 gives this pattern its characteristic groove. Practice the chunk separately until it's comfortable.

Variation with Accent

Adding a strong accent on beat 1.

↓		↓	↑	x	↑	↓	↑
1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&

Double Chunk

A more percussive variation.

↓		x	↑	x	↑	↓	↑
1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&

Calypso

A lighter, more syncopated Caribbean feel. *100–140 BPM.*

↓			↑	↓	↑		↑
1	&	(2)	&	3	&	(4)	&

The missing downbeats on 2 and 4 create a buoyant, floating feel.

Jawaiian

Hawaiian reggae fusion—laid-back with island warmth.

↓	↑	x			↑	↓	↑
1	&	2	&	(3)	&	4	&

Combines the reggae offbeat emphasis with the Hawaiian chunk. Popular in contemporary Hawaiian music. *80–120 BPM.*

B.3 Reggae Patterns

Sparse and laid-back. The silence on beats 1 and 3 creates tension that resolves on the accented backbeats. Less is more—let the rests breathe.

One-Drop

Emphasis on beats 2 and 4 (the backbeats). The silence on 1 and 3 creates tension that resolves on the accented beats. *70–100 BPM.*

	↓		↓
(1)	2	(3)	4

Skank

Quick, choppy strums with mutes. *70–100 BPM.*

x		↓	x	x		↓	x
1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&

Ska Upstroke

Fast, punchy upstrokes on the offbeats—the defining ska sound. *120–160 BPM.*

	↑		↑		↑		↑
(1)	&	(2)	&	(3)	&	(4)	&

All the strums happen on the "and" of each beat. The downbeats are ghost strums—your hand moves down but misses the strings, keeping constant motion at tempos that often exceed 160 BPM. Keep strokes short and tight—don't let notes ring.

Reggae Chuck

Combines reggae rhythm with percussive muting.

		↓	x			↓	x
(1)	&	2	&	(3)	&	4	&

The chuck immediately after the strum cuts the note short, creating a tight, rhythmic pulse. Think of the chuck as the ukulele's snare drum—a sharp click produced by damping the strings with the palm immediately after striking. Essential for Jack Johnson-style acoustic pop. *70–110 BPM.*

B.4 Rock/Pop Patterns

Driving and energetic. Keep strums tight and consistent with strong downbeat accents. These patterns push the song forward with momentum.

Standard Rock

Driving eighth notes with accents. *100–140 BPM.*

↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&

Pop Ballad

Gentle, flowing pattern. *70–100 BPM.*

↓			↑	↓	↑		↑
1	&	(2)	&	3	&	(4)	&

Driving Rock

All downstrokes with power. *100–160 BPM.*

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
1 2 3 4

B.5 3/4 (Waltz) Patterns

Graceful and flowing with a "ONE-two-three" feel. The strong accent on beat 1 followed by lighter beats 2 and 3 creates the characteristic waltz sway. 80–130 BPM.

Basic Waltz

↓ ↓ ↓
1 2 3

Boom-Chuck-Chuck

Bass note followed by chord strums.

BASS ↓ ↓
1 2 3

(Pluck only the C string—your lowest note—on beat 1; strum fully on 2 and 3)

Waltz with Upstrums

↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑
1 & 2 & 3 &

B.6 6/8 Patterns

Compound time creates a lilting, rolling feel—think of waves or a gentle jig. Each measure has two main beats subdivided into threes.

Basic 6/8

Two groups of three. *40–80 BPM* (count in dotted-quarter beats).

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
1 2 3 4 5 6

Irish/Folk 6/8

Lilting pattern for jigs and slow ballads like "House of the Rising Sun." *60–100 BPM.*

↓	↓	↑	↓	↓	↑
1	2	3	4	5	6

B.7 Swing/Jazz Patterns

Syncopated and sophisticated. The emphasis shifts away from beat 1, creating that characteristic "swing" feel. Think snapping fingers on 2 and 4.

Basic Swing

Emphasize beats 2 and 4. In swing feel, the eighth notes are *not* even—the downbeat is lengthened and the upbeat shortened in an approximately 2:1 ratio based on triplets. Vocalize "HUMP-ty DUMP-ty" to internalize the loping groove. *80–120 BPM.*

↓	**x**	↓	**x**
1	2	3	4

Charleston

Syncopated jazz pattern. *100–140 BPM.*

↓			↑			↓	
1	&	(2)	&	(3)	&	4	&

Jazz Comping

Sparse, syncopated hits. *80–120 BPM.*

		↓			↑	↓	
(1)	&	2	&	(3)	&	4	&

B.8 Fingerpicking Patterns

Melodic and intimate. Each note rings out separately, creating a harp-like texture. These patterns work beautifully for ballads and introspective songs.

Basic Arpeggio

60–100 BPM.

p	i	m	a	m	i	p	---
1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&

Travis Picking

60–100 BPM.

```
   p   m   p   m   p   m   p   m
(G) (E)   (C) (E)   (G) (E)   (C) (E)
```

Pinch Pattern

60–90 BPM.

```
p+a   i   m   i   p+a   i   m   i
  1    &   2   &   3    &   4   &
```

B.9 Advanced Techniques

These techniques require practice but add professional polish to your playing. Master the basic patterns first.

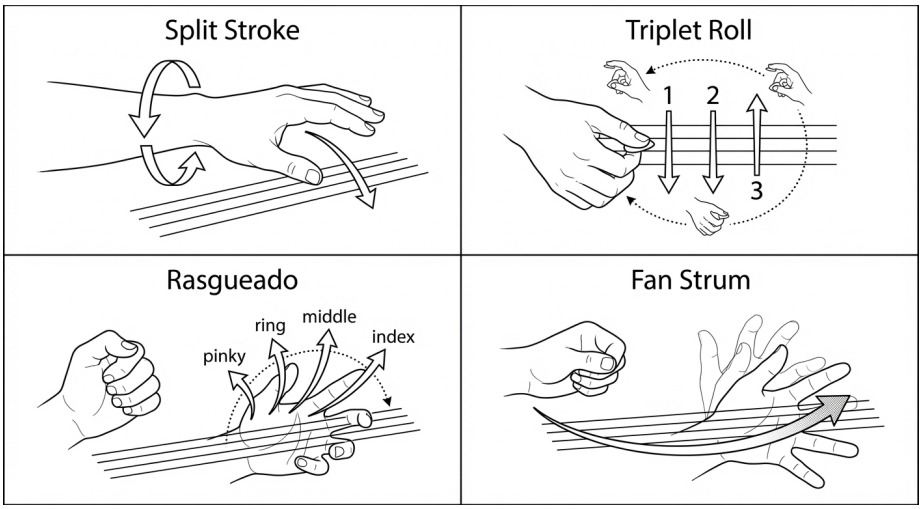
Split Stroke

A syncopated technique popularized by George Formby that creates the illusion of two instruments playing at once. *100–160 BPM.*

```
BASS↓           ↑  BASS↓           ↑
  1     &   (2)  &    3     &   (4)  &
```

The technique relies on forearm rotation—the "doorknob" motion: a full downstrum, an up catch on the high strings, a split touch on the low strings, then a full downstrum. The accented offbeats mimic a ragtime piano's right hand.

Tip: The split stroke sounds like two separate motions but is really one fluid gesture. Think of "peeling" across the strings rather than hitting them all at once. Start slowly until the forearm rotation feels natural.



Advanced strumming techniques: split stroke, triplet roll, rasgueado, and fan strum.

Triplet Roll

A blazing-fast triplet technique popularized by Jake Shimabukuro. Three quick strums in the space of one beat—creates excitement and fills. *80–160 BPM.*

↓↑↓	↓	↓↑↓	↓
1-trip-let	2	3-trip-let	4

The index finger strums down, the thumb strums down, then the index strums up—all in tight succession. Because both digits work as an alternating unit, the hand barely moves, allowing speeds that exceed normal wrist oscillation. Use sparingly at phrase endings or to build intensity.

Flamenco Rasgueado

A rapid roll using multiple fingers in sequence.

1. Curl all four fingers into your palm
2. Flick out pinky, then ring, middle, index in rapid succession
3. Each finger strums down across the strings
4. End with a thumb stroke for the final accent

This creates a dramatic, rolling strum heard in flamenco and Spanish styles.

Triple Strum

The **triple strum** (popularized by George Formby) packs three strums into a single beat, creating a lively, energetic sound.

Basic Triple Pattern

↓↑↓	↓	↓↑↓	↓
1 (trip-let)	2	3 (trip-let)	4

The three strums (down-up-down) happen quickly in the space normally occupied by one beat.

Technique

1. Keep your wrist loose and flexible
2. The motion comes from the wrist, not the arm
3. Start slowly: "DOWN-up-down, DOWN, DOWN-up-down, DOWN"
4. Gradually increase speed until it becomes one fluid motion

Fan Strum

The **fan strum** (or "finger roll") uses individual fingers striking in sequence for a dramatic, harp-like effect.

Technique

1. Start with fingers loosely curled
2. Strike down with your pinky nail across all strings
3. Immediately follow with ring, middle, then index fingers
4. Each finger "fans out" in sequence
5. The four strums should blur into one rolling sound

`(pinky)(ring)(middle)(index)`

All four strikes happen within one beat

Tip: The fan strum is essentially a slow-motion rasgueado. Practice the rasgueado first (previous section), then adapt it for the fan strum's more deliberate roll.

Thumb Roll

A gentler roll using only the thumb across all strings.

1. Drag your thumb slowly across all four strings (G to A)
2. Let each string ring separately before the next is struck
3. Creates a soft, arpeggiated strum—perfect for ballads

B.10 Practice Tips

1. **Start slow**: Use a metronome at 50–60 BPM
2. **Master one at a time**: Don't move on until the pattern is automatic
3. **Use a single chord**: Practice the strum on C or Am before adding changes
4. **Count out loud**: "1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and"
5. **Watch your hand**: Ensure smooth, consistent motion
6. **Record yourself**: Listen back to check timing

Appendix C

Ukulele Care and Maintenance

Proper care keeps your ukulele playing and sounding its best for years. This appendix covers essential maintenance tasks.

C.1 Daily Care

Before Playing

- Wash and dry your hands to remove oils and dirt
- Check tuning—strings naturally go out of tune
- Inspect strings for signs of wear

After Playing

- Wipe down strings with a dry cloth to remove finger oils
- Wipe the fretboard and body
- Return the ukulele to its case or stand

Tip: The oils from your fingers cause strings to degrade faster. A quick wipe after each session significantly extends string life.

C.2 String Care

When to Change Strings

Replace strings when you notice:

- Dull, lifeless tone (strings lose brightness over time)

- Difficulty staying in tune
- Visible wear, discoloration, or flat spots
- Rough texture or corrosion
- Intonation problems (chords sound out of tune even when open strings are correct)

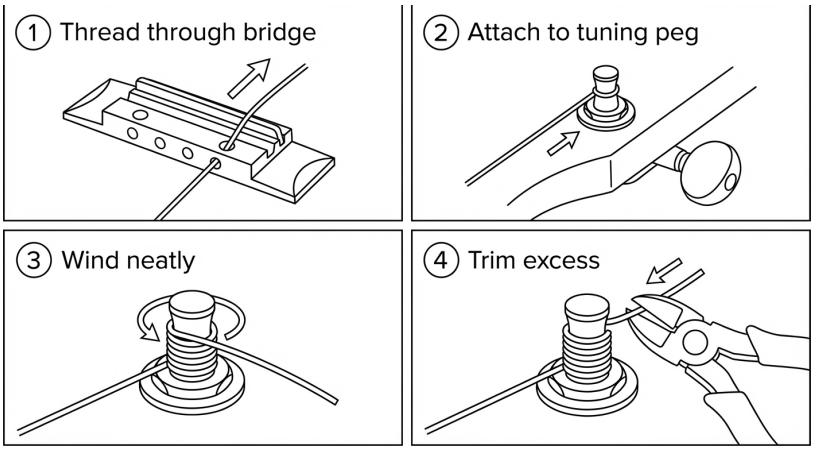
Most players change strings every 2–6 months with regular playing.

Changing Strings

Tools needed: New strings, wire cutters (optional), string winder (optional)

Steps:

1. Loosen the old string by turning the tuning peg
2. Remove the string from the tuning peg
3. Remove the string from the bridge (varies by bridge type)
4. Thread the new string through the bridge hole
5. Pull the string up to the tuning peg
6. Insert through the peg hole, leaving some slack
7. Wind the string, keeping coils neat and below the starting point
8. Tune up slowly, stretching the string gently
9. Trim excess string with wire cutters



String changing steps: thread, attach, wind, and trim.

Tip: Change strings one at a time to maintain tension on the neck. This also makes re-stringing easier since you can reference the other strings.

Stretching New Strings

New strings take time to settle. Speed up the process:

1. Tune to pitch
2. Gently pull each string away from the fretboard (mid-point)
3. Retune (it will have dropped)
4. Repeat until strings hold tune

C.3 Cleaning Your Ukulele

The Body

Routine cleaning:

- Use a soft, lint-free cloth (microfiber works well)
- Wipe down after each session
- For fingerprints, breathe on the surface and wipe

Deep cleaning:

- Use a guitar polish designed for your finish type
- Apply polish to the cloth, not directly to the ukulele
- Buff gently in circular motions
- Avoid getting polish on the fretboard

The Fretboard

Routine care:

- Wipe with a dry cloth when changing strings
- Remove any visible gunk with a slightly damp cloth

Conditioning (unfinished fretboards):

- Apply a purpose-made fretboard conditioner 2–4 times per year

- Use sparingly—a few drops spread with a cloth
- Let it soak for a few minutes, then wipe off excess
- Do NOT use on maple or other finished fretboards

> **Important:** Avoid generic "lemon oil" products sold in hardware stores—most are petroleum-based and can damage wood, dissolve glue joints, and degrade frets over time. Instead, use a conditioner specifically designed for instrument fretboards.

The Frets

Clean frets when they look tarnished:

- Mask off the fretboard wood with painter's tape
- Polish frets with extra-fine steel wool (0000 grade)
- Rub along the fret length, not across
- Wipe away debris
- Remove tape and clean fretboard

C.4 Storage

Temperature and Humidity

Wood is sensitive to environmental conditions:

Ideal humidity: 45–55% relative humidity

Danger zone (dry): Below 40%—wood can crack

Danger zone (wet): Above 60%—wood can swell, finish may blister

Ideal temperature: 18–24°C (65–75°F)

Protection strategies:

- Store in a hard case with a humidifier in dry climates
- Use a room humidifier in winter when heating dries air
- Avoid leaving in cars, attics, or garages
- Don't store near heating vents or in direct sunlight

Stands and Cases

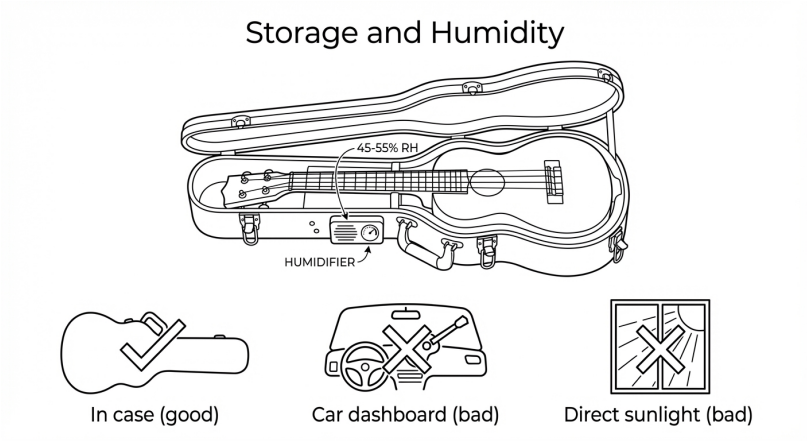
Soft gig bag: Good for transport; minimal protection

Hardshell case: Best protection; essential for travel

Wall hanger: Keeps ukulele accessible; watch for humidity/sunlight

Floor stand: Convenient for practice; choose a stable model

Tip: The best ukulele is one you play often. Keep it out on a stand where you'll pick it up frequently, but protect it from environmental extremes.



Proper storage with a humidifier; avoid cars and direct sunlight.

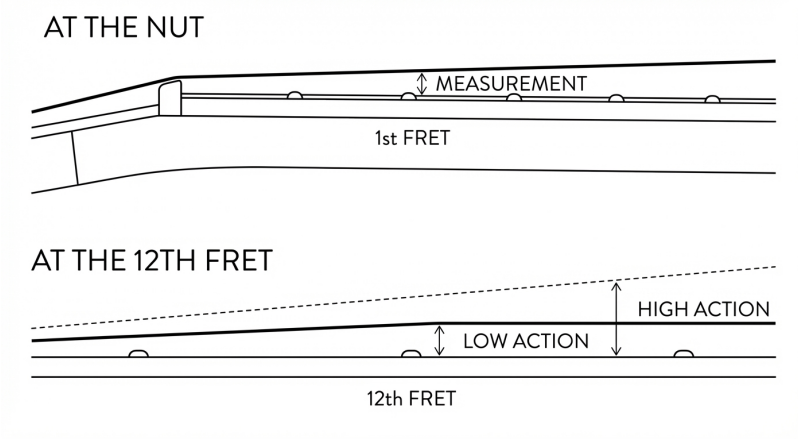
C.5 Basic Setup and Adjustments

Action

Action is the distance between strings and fretboard.

- **Low action:** Easier to play, but may buzz
- **High action:** Harder to play, but cleaner tone

Action is adjusted at the nut and saddle. Lowering the action involves removing material from the nut slots or the bottom of the saddle—a **permanent modification** that cannot be undone. If you remove too much, you'll need a new saddle or nut. This work is best left to a professional luthier to avoid irreversible damage and intonation problems.



Measuring string action at the nut and 12th fret.

Intonation

If your ukulele plays in tune when open but sounds wrong higher up the neck, the intonation may need adjustment. This is typically a setup issue best addressed by a professional.

Tuning Peg Maintenance

If tuning pegs slip or feel stiff:

- For friction pegs: Adjust the screw tension on the back
- For geared tuners: Check for loose screws; lubricate if sticky

C.6 When to See a Professional

Consult a luthier for:

- Cracks in the wood
- Warped or bowed neck
- Lifting bridge
- Worn or uneven frets
- Significant action or intonation problems
- Any damage that affects playability

C.7 Maintenance Checklist

Frequency	Task
After each session	Wipe strings and body
Weekly	Check tuning pegs, inspect strings
Monthly	Clean fretboard, check humidity
Every 2–6 months	Change strings
2–4 times per year	Condition fretboard (if unfinished)
Yearly	Professional setup/inspection (optional)

Appendix D

Baritone Ukulele Reference

The baritone ukulele is the largest member of the ukulele family, with a deeper, more guitar-like tone. Unlike soprano, concert, and tenor ukuleles that use GCEA tuning, the baritone uses DGBE tuning—the same as the top four strings of a guitar. This appendix helps baritone players use the chord diagrams and songs throughout this book.

D.1 Understanding DGBE Tuning

Comparing Tunings

Instrument	String 4	String 3	String 2	String 1
Standard Ukulele (GCEA)	G	C	E	A
Baritone Ukulele (DGBE)	D	G	B	E
Guitar (top 4 strings)	D	G	B	E

The baritone ukulele is tuned a perfect fourth (5 semitones) lower than a standard ukulele. This means:

- The same chord *shape* on baritone produces a chord that sounds a fourth lower
- A "C shape" on baritone actually produces a G chord
- Baritone chord shapes are identical to guitar chord shapes (top 4 strings)

Tip: If you already play guitar, you'll find baritone ukulele immediately familiar—the chord shapes you know will work perfectly!

D.2 Chord Conversion Chart

When you see a chord in this book, use the table below to find the equivalent baritone chord. The fingering shape stays the same; only the chord name changes.

Book Chord (GCEA)	Baritone Equivalent (DGBE)	Notes
C	G	Same shape
G	D	Same shape
F	C	Same shape
Am	Em	Same shape
Dm	Am	Same shape
Em	Bm	Requires barre
A	E	Same shape
E	B	Requires barre
D	A	Same shape
G7	D7	Same shape
C7	G7	Same shape
D7	A7	Same shape
A7	E7	Same shape
E7	B7	Same shape
Cmaj7	Gmaj7	Same shape
Am7	Em7	Same shape
Dm7	Am7	Same shape

Quick Reference: The Interval Relationship

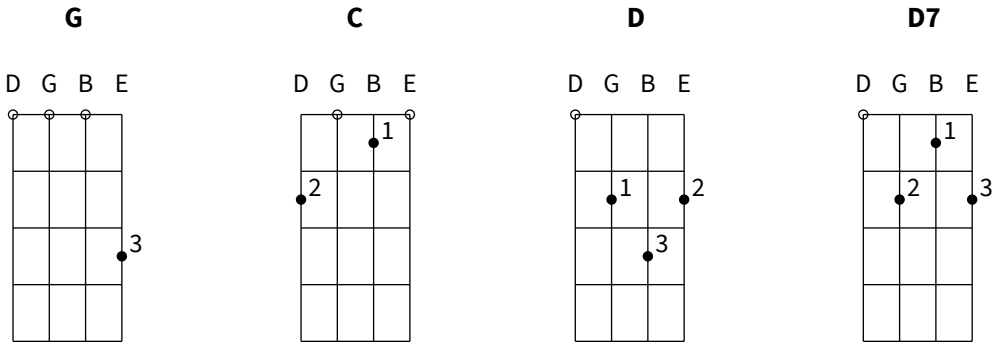
To convert any chord from this book to baritone, move **down a perfect fourth** (or equivalently, **up a perfect fifth**):

C	→	G	D	→	A	E	→	B
F	→	C	G	→	D	A	→	E
B♭	→	F	B	→	F♯			

D.3 Essential Baritone Chord Diagrams

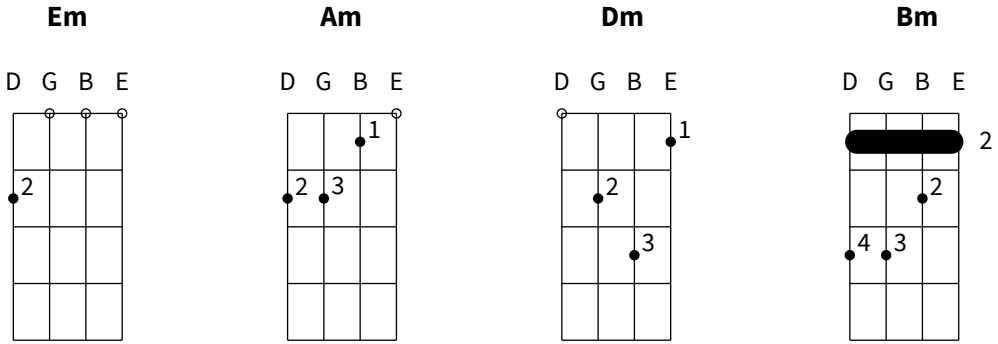
These are the most common chords you'll need when playing baritone ukulele. The shapes below are shown in DGBE tuning.

Primary Chords

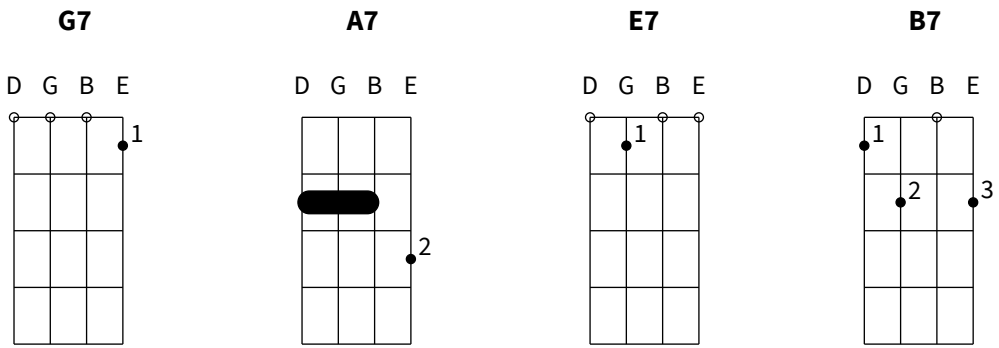


Tip: These four chords—G, C, D, and D7—allow you to play countless songs in the key of G major, one of the most common keys for baritone ukulele.

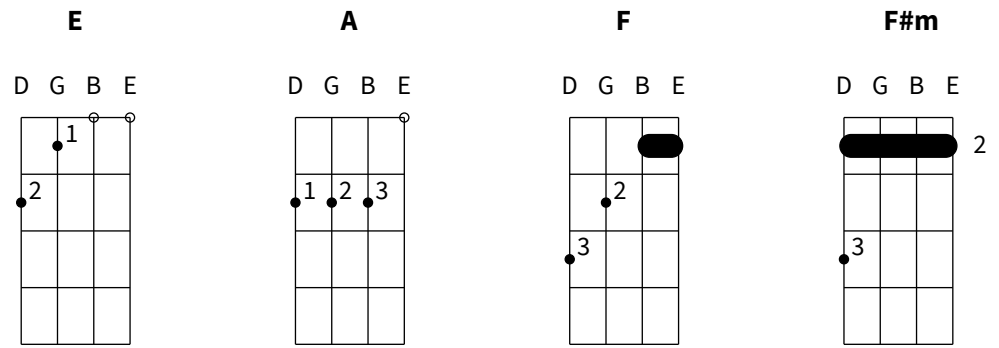
Minor Chords



Dominant Seventh Chords



Additional Useful Chords



D.4 Transposition Guide

Scenario 1: Same Shapes, Different Key

The simplest approach is to use the conversion chart above and accept that everything sounds a perfect fourth lower. For example, a song written in C major will sound in G major on your baritone. The chord *relationships* stay the same, so the song sounds perfectly fine—just in a lower key. This is ideal for solo playing.

Scenario 2: Matching the Original Key

If you need to match the original key (for example, to play along with a recording or with standard ukulele players), you have two options:

1. **Use a capo on fret 5**: This raises the baritone's pitch by a perfect fourth, effectively matching standard GCEA tuning. Use the book's chord shapes as written.

2. **Use different shapes**: Play the book's shapes that are a fourth *higher* than written, so that the baritone's lower tuning brings them back to the original key. The table below shows which book shapes to use.

Same-Key Transposition Reference

To play in the original key on baritone *without* a capo, use the book's shapes from the "Use These Book Shapes" column. Because baritone tuning lowers every shape by a perfect fourth, these higher shapes will sound at the intended pitch.

Original Key	Use These Book Shapes		
C Major (C, F, G7)	F	B♭	C7
G Major (G, C, D7)	C	F	G7
F Major (F, B♭, C7)	B♭	E♭	F7

For example, if a song uses C, F, and G7, play the book's F, B♭, and C7 shapes instead. On your baritone, those shapes will sound as C, F, and G7—matching the original key.

Tip: Many baritone players simply embrace the lower pitch—the rich, warm tone of baritone is one of its greatest features! Matching the original key is only necessary when playing with other musicians or along with recordings.

D.5 Practice Tips for Baritone Players

1. **Start with G, C, D, D7**: These are the easiest and most useful baritone chords
2. **Learn the conversion**: Memorize that your "C shape" = G, "G shape" = D, etc.
3. **Use guitar resources**: Any guitar chord chart works for baritone (top 4 strings)
4. **Experiment with fingerpicking**: The baritone's longer scale length is ideal for fingerstyle
5. **Try a capo**: A capo at fret 5 lets you play along with standard ukulele players

Appendix E

30-Day Practice Plan

This 30-day plan provides a structured path through the material in this book. Each day requires approximately 15–20 minutes of focused practice. The plan follows the book's progression, building skills systematically from your first chords to playing complete songs.

How to Use This Plan: Treat this as a guide, not a strict schedule. If you need more time on a particular skill, take it—solid foundations matter more than speed. Check off each day as you complete it, and don't skip the review days.

Week 1: First Sounds (Days 1–7)

Days 1–2: Getting Started
Learn to tune your ukulele (Chapter 1). Practice holding it comfortably. Master the C chord—strum it until it rings clearly every time.

Days 3–4: Am and F Chords
Add the Am and F chords to your vocabulary (Chapter 2). Practice switching between C, Am, and F slowly and deliberately.

Days 5–6: G and G7 Chords
Learn G and G7 chords. Practice the basic downstrum pattern (Chapter 3). Focus on keeping a steady rhythm.

Day 7: Week 1 Review
Play through all five chords: C, Am, F, G, G7. Try a simple song from Chapter 13.

Week 2: Building Fluency (Days 8–14)

Days 8–9: One-Minute Changes
Time yourself: how many times can you switch between two chords in one minute? Practice C–Am, C–F, and C–G transitions.

Days 10–11: Island Strum Pattern

Learn the island strum (down, rest, down-up, chunk-up, down-up) from Chapter 3. Apply it to the chords you know.

Days 12–13: D Family Chords

Add D, Dm, and D7 to your chord vocabulary (Chapter 4). Practice switching between all your chords.

Day 14: Week 2 Review

Play two or three beginner songs from Chapter 13 with the island strum pattern.

Week 3: Expanding Skills (Days 15–21)

Days 15–16: E and A Family Chords

Learn E, Em, E7, A, and A7 chords (Chapter 4). These open up many more songs.

Days 17–18: Introduction to Barre Technique

Begin practicing barre chord technique (Chapter 5). Start with B♭ and work on building finger strength.

Days 19–20: Seventh Chord Shapes

Study seventh chords in depth (Chapter 6). Learn Cmaj7, Am7, Dm7, and G7 shapes.

Day 21: Week 3 Review

Practice intermediate songs from Chapter 14. Focus on smooth chord transitions.

Week 4: Integration (Days 22–28)

Days 22–23: Advanced Strumming Patterns

Work through the patterns in Chapter 7. Practice muting, syncopation, and dynamic control.

Days 24–25: Keys and Transposition

Study Chapter 8 on playing in different keys. Practice transposing a song you know into a new key.

Days 26–27: Fingerpicking Introduction

Begin fingerstyle technique from Chapter 10. Practice basic picking patterns on chords you know well.

Day 28: Week 4 Review

Put together strumming, chord changes, and any fingerpicking you've learned. Play through several songs.

Days 29–30: Celebration

Day 29: Learn a Complete Song

Choose a song that excites you—from this book or elsewhere. Spend the day learning it thoroughly: verses, chorus, any tricky transitions.

Day 30: Perform!

Play your song for someone—a friend, family member, or even just a recording of yourself. Celebrate how far you've come in 30 days!

Beyond 30 Days: This plan gives you a strong foundation, but your ukulele journey is just beginning. Continue exploring the advanced chapters on jazz chords (Chapter 9), music theory (Chapter 11), and performance skills (Chapter 12). Set new goals: learn a challenging song each month, join a ukulele group, or explore a new genre. The ukulele rewards lifelong learning!

Appendix F

Left-Handed Ukulele Guide

This appendix provides mirrored chord diagrams and guidance for left-handed players who choose to restring their ukulele for left-handed play.

Two Approaches for Left-Handed Players

Option 1: Play right-handed. Many left-handed players learn in standard right-handed orientation. This lets you pick up any ukulele and follow all diagrams as written. Your dominant hand handles the strumming and keeps the rhythm, which some consider an advantage.

Option 2: Play left-handed. Restring your ukulele so the A string is closest to your face (top) and the G string is closest to the floor (bottom). This feels more natural for some players but requires mirroring all standard diagrams.

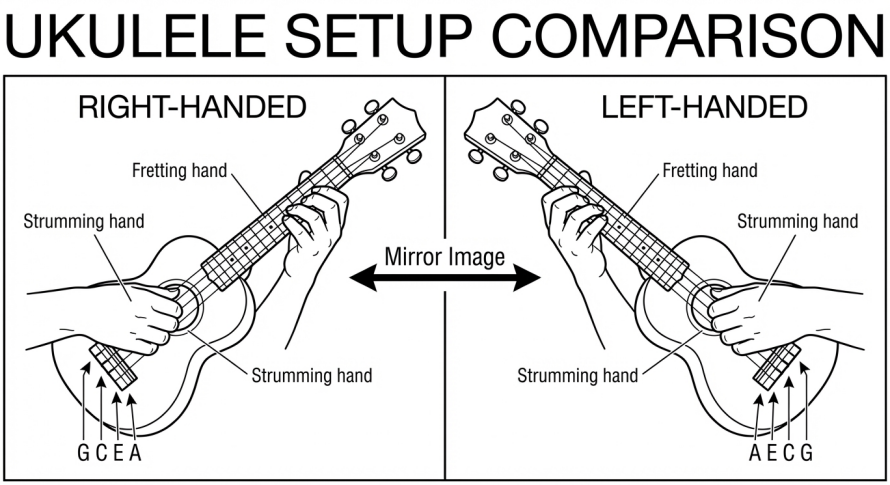
If you choose Option 2, this appendix is for you.

How to Read These Mirrored Diagrams

In left-handed orientation:

- The **A string** (thinnest) is at the **top**, closest to your face
- The **G string** (re-entrant) is at the **bottom**, closest to the floor
- Your right hand frets the strings; your left hand strums

The diagrams below show exactly what you see when looking down at your fretboard.

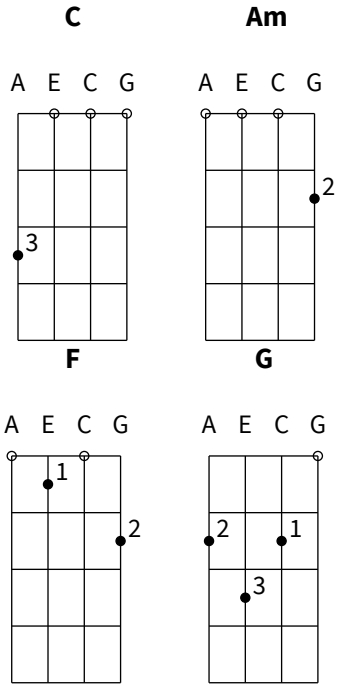


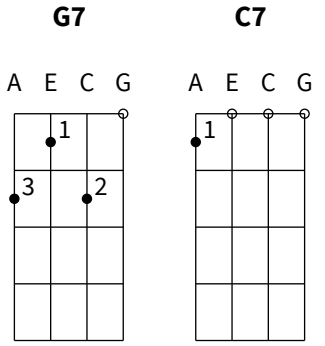
Right-handed vs. left-handed ukulele setup: a mirror image.

Essential Chords for Left-Handed Players

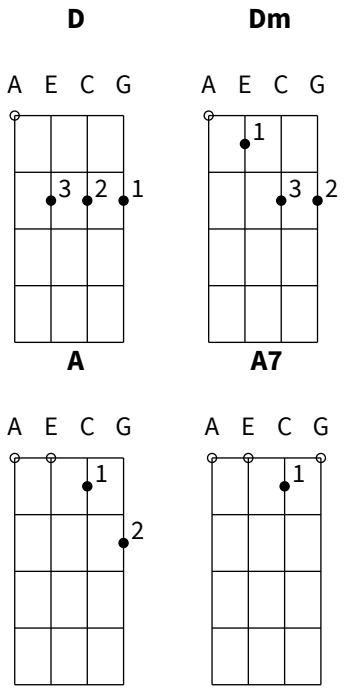
The First Five Chords

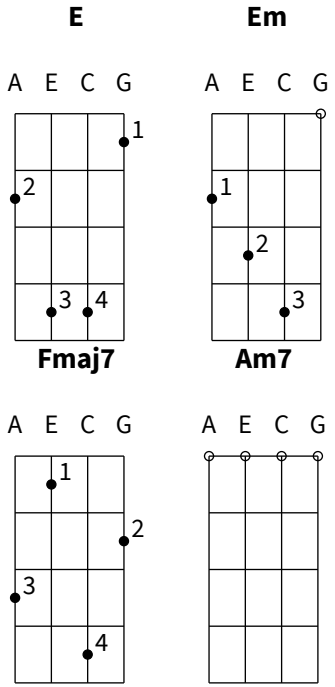
These are the same chords taught in Chapter 2, mirrored for left-handed play.



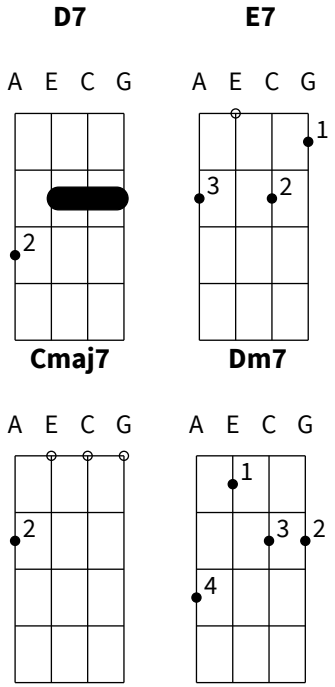


Extended Chord Vocabulary



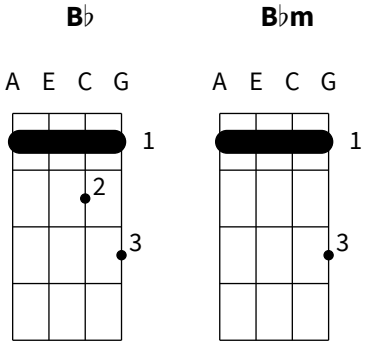


Seventh Chords



Barre Chords

Left-handed barre chords work the same way—your index finger bars across all strings, and additional fingers form the chord shape.



Move these shapes up the neck to play any major or minor chord. See Chapter 5 for the complete barre chord system.

Tips for Left-Handed Success

1. **Commit to one approach.** Switching between left- and right-handed play creates confusion. Pick one and stick with it.

2. **Restring properly.** When converting a right-handed ukulele, reverse all four strings so the thickest-sounding string (C) ends up third from the top.

3. **Check nut slots.** The nut slots on most ukuleles are cut to match each string's gauge—wider for the thicker C string and narrower for the thinner A string. When you reverse the strings, a thick string in a narrow slot can bind and go out of tune, while a thin string in a wide slot can rattle and buzz. If you hear buzzing or have tuning problems after restringing, have a luthier widen or fill the slots to match the new string positions.

4. **Bookmark this appendix.** Return here whenever you learn a new chord from the main text.

5. **Mirror mentally for advanced chords.** Once you're comfortable with the basics, you'll find it easier to mirror diagrams in your head. The pattern is simple: swap left and right.

Tip: Many famous guitarists play left-handed, including Paul McCartney and Kurt Cobain. Playing left-handed is equally valid—don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Appendix G

Chord Progression Reference

This appendix maps common chord progressions across genres and modes. Use Roman numerals to transpose these patterns to any key.

Reading Roman Numerals

- **Uppercase** (I, IV, V) = Major chords
- **Lowercase** (i, iv, v) = Minor chords
- ° = Diminished chord
- ♭ = Lowered by one semitone
- **7, maj7, m7** = Seventh chord extensions

G.1 Major Key Progressions

The foundation of Western music. These progressions are built on the major scale.

Name	Chords	Character
Pop / Four Chords	I – V – vi – IV	Most popular in modern pop
Classic Rock	I – IV – V	Backbone of rock 'n' roll
50s / Doo-Wop	I – vi – IV – V	Iconic 1950s ballad sound
Folk / Country	I – IV – I – V	Warm, comfortable feel
Sad / Emotional	vi – IV – I – V	Melancholic (starts on vi)
Reggae	I – IV – V – IV	Laid-back island groove
Pachelbel's Canon	I – V – vi – iii – IV – I – IV – V	Wedding standard

Jazz Progressions (Major)

Name	Chords	Character
Jazz ii–V–I	ii – V – I	Fundamental jazz cadence
Jazz ii–V–I (7ths)	ii^{m7} – V^{7} – I^{maj7}	Classic with seventh chords
Jazz Turnaround	I^{maj7} – vi^{m7} – ii^{m7} – V^{7}	Four-chord cycle for standards
Smooth Soul	I^{maj7} – iii^{m7} – vi^{m7} – IV^{maj7}	Lush, soulful warmth
Bossa Nova	I^{maj7} – ii^{m9} – V^{7} – I^{maj7}	Smooth Brazilian feel
Jazz Swing	I^{6} – vi^{m7} – ii^{m7} – V^{7}	Classic upbeat swing

Blues Progressions

Name	Chords	Character
12-Bar Blues	I(x4) – IV(x2) – I(x2) – V – IV – I – V	Foundational blues form
8-Bar Blues	I – V – IV – IV – I – V – I – V	Compact blues form

Other Major Key Patterns

Name	Chords	Character
Circle	vi – ii – V – I	Descending fifths (classical/jazz)
Standard Bridge	I – IV – ii – V	Common bridge pattern
Ascending Bass	I – iii – IV – V	Smooth ascending bass line
Rock Cadence	♭VI – ♭VII – I	Powerful rock ending
Ambient Pop	I^{sus2} – V – vi – IV^{sus4}	Open, airy texture
Anthem Rock	I^{sus4} – I – V^{sus4} – V	Building tension/release

G.2 Minor Key Progressions

Built on the natural minor (Aeolian) scale. The V chord is often major (from harmonic minor) for stronger resolution.

Name	Chords	Character
Natural Minor	i – VII – VI – VII	Dark, moody descent
Andalusian	i – VII – VI – V	Dramatic flamenco style
Minor Pop	i – VI – III – VII	Minor four-chord loop
Minor Blues	i – iv – i – V	Raw, expressive blues
Minor Jazz (7ths)	i^{m7} – iv^{m7} – V^{7} – i^{m7}	Jazz cycle with V7 pull
Noir Jazz	i^{m7} – VII^{maj7} – III^{maj7} – V^{7}	Dark, cinematic
La Folia	i – V – i – VII – III – VII – i – V – i	Ancient (15th c.), dramatic
Minor ii–V–i	$ii^{m7\flat5}$ – V^{7} – i^{m7}	Essential minor jazz cadence

G.3 Modal Progressions

Each mode has a signature interval that gives it a unique character.

Dorian Mode

Signature: Minor scale with raised 6th. Sounds "cool" and jazzy.

Name	Chords	Character
Dorian Vamp	i – IV	Modal vamp ("Oye Como Va")
Dorian Funk	i – IV – v – IV	Groovy, bright minor sound
Dorian Soul	i – VII – IV – i	Soulful with raised 6th
Dorian Jazz	i^{m7} – ii^{m7} – III^{maj7} – IV^{7}	Ascending jazz pattern

Phrygian Mode

Signature: Minor scale with flat 2nd. Sounds exotic and Spanish.

Name	Chords	Character
Phrygian Flamenco	i – ♭II – ♭III – ♭II	Iconic flamenco tension
Phrygian Vamp	i – ♭II – i	Hypnotic oscillation
Phrygian Dark	i – ♭II – ♭vii – i	Brooding, atmospheric

Lydian Mode

Signature: Major scale with raised 4th. Sounds dreamy and floating.

Name	Chords	Character
Lydian Float	I – II	Dreamy shimmer
Lydian Shimmer	I – vii° – II – I	Sparkling cycle
Lydian Ascent	I – II – iii – II	Bright, upward wonder

Mixolydian Mode

Signature: Major scale with flat 7th. Sounds bluesy and rock.

Name	Chords	Character
Mixolydian Rock	I – ♭VII – IV – I	Powerful rock pattern
Mixolydian Groove	I – IV – ♭VII – IV	Laid-back jam groove
Mixolydian Blues	I^{7} – ii – ♭VII – IV^{7}	Bluesy shuffle

Locrian Mode

Signature: Diminished scale (flat 2nd and flat 5th). Unstable and tense.

Name	Chords	Character
Locrian Tension	i° – ♭II – ♭iii	Constant instability
Locrian Drift	i° – ♭II – ♭V – ♭VI	Restless, experimental

G.4 Key Reference Charts

Use these tables to translate Roman numerals into actual chords.

Major Keys

Key	I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii°
C Major	C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	B°
G Major	G	Am	Bm	C	D	Em	F♯°
D Major	D	Em	F♯m	G	A	Bm	C♯°
A Major	A	Bm	C♯m	D	E	F♯m	G♯°
E Major	E	F♯m	G♯m	A	B	C♯m	D♯°
F Major	F	Gm	Am	B♭	C	Dm	E°
B♭ Major	B♭	Cm	Dm	E♭	F	Gm	A°
E♭ Major	E♭	Fm	Gm	A♭	B♭	Cm	D°

Minor Keys

The V column shows the major chord (from harmonic minor) commonly used for stronger resolution.

Key	i	ii°	III	iv	V	VI	VII
A Minor	Am	B°	C	Dm	E	F	G
E Minor	Em	F♯°	G	Am	B	C	D
D Minor	Dm	E°	F	Gm	A	B♭	C
G Minor	Gm	A°	B♭	Cm	D	E♭	F
C Minor	Cm	D°	E♭	Fm	G	A♭	B♭
B Minor	Bm	C♯°	D	Em	F♯	G	A
F♯ Minor	F♯m	G♯°	A	Bm	C♯	D	E

Using This Reference

1. **Pick a progression** that matches the mood you want
2. **Choose your key** from the reference charts above
3. **Translate** the Roman numerals to actual chords
4. **Experiment** with variations—swap a major for minor, add sevenths, change the order

---

Tip: Start with the "Pop / Four Chords" progression (I – V – vi – IV) in the key of C: **C – G – Am – F**. This single progression underlies hundreds of hit songs.

Appendix H
Reading Tablature (TAB)

Tablature (TAB) is a popular notation system that shows exactly where to place your fingers. This appendix covers how to read TAB notation you'll find in online resources, songbooks, and ukulele communities.

H.1 TAB Basics

TAB uses four horizontal lines representing the four strings of your ukulele. Numbers on each line indicate which fret to press.

```
A |---0---2---3---|
E |---0---0---0---|
C |---0---0---0---|
G |---0---2---0---|
```

Lines Each line is a string. The A string (thinnest) is on top; G string (4th) is on bottom.

Numbers The fret to press. 0 means play the string open (no fretting).

Reading order Left to right, like reading text.

Stacked numbers Play simultaneously (a chord).

H.2 Common TAB Symbols

Symbol	Meaning
h	Hammer-on (e.g., 2h4 = hammer from fret 2 to 4)
p	Pull-off (e.g., 4p2 = pull off from fret 4 to 2)
/	Slide up (e.g., 2/4 = slide from fret 2 to 4)
\	Slide down (e.g., 4\2)
b	Bend the string
r	Release bend
x	Muted string (percussive hit)
~	Vibrato

H.3 TAB Examples

Single Notes (Melody)

Play each note one at a time, left to right:

Melody

```
A |---0---2---3---2---0---|
E |-----------------------|
C |-----------------------|
G |-----------------------|
```

Chords in TAB

Numbers stacked vertically are played together. This shows a C chord:

C Chord

```
A |---3---|
E |---0---|
C |---0---|
G |---0---|
```

Combining Melody and Chords

Melody and Chords

```
A |---3-------3-------0---|
E |---0---0-------0-------|
C |---0-------0-------0---|
G |---0---2-------2-------|
```

H.4 Technique Examples

The symbols from the table above come alive when you see them in short musical phrases. Each example below is written for standard G-C-E-A tuning.

Hammer-On and Pull-Off

This phrase decorates a C chord with a hammer-on on the A string and a pull-off on the G string—a classic Hawaiian fingerpicking ornament:

Hammer-On / Pull-Off

```
A |---0h2---2-------0---|
E |-------0---0---0-----|
C |---0-------0---------|
G |---0-----------3p0---|
```

Slides

Ascending and descending slides on the A string create smooth melodic transitions between positions:

Slides

```
A |---2/5---5\3---3/7---|
E |---------------------|
C |---------------------|
G |---------------------|
```

Bends and Releases

A blues-flavored phrase using a half-step bend and a bend-and-release on the E string:

Bends

```
A |--------------------------|
E |---5---5b6---7b9r7---5----|
C |--------------------------|
G |--------------------------|
```

Muted Strums (Chuck)

The signature ukulele percussive strum alternates an open chord with muted hits marked `x`:

Chuck Strum

```
A |---0---x---0---x---0---|
E |---0---x---0---x---0---|
C |---0---x---0---x---0---|
G |---0---x---0---x---0---|
```

Vibrato

A held note with vibrato at the end of a melodic phrase on the A string:

Vibrato

```
A |---5---7---5---7~---|
E |--------------------|
C |--------------------|
G |--------------------|
```

Combined Techniques

A fingerpicking pattern over a C chord that chains hammer-ons and pull-offs together:

Combined

```
A |---0h2-------2p0---0---|
E |-------0---0-------0---|
C |---0-------0-------0---|
G |---0-------0-------0---|
```

H.5 TAB vs. Chord Diagrams

Feature	TAB	Chord Diagrams
Shows timing	Sometimes (with rhythm notation)	No
Shows finger positions	Fret numbers only	Visual finger placement
Best for	Melodies, fingerpicking	Strumming, chord shapes
Learning curve	Very easy	Very easy

Tip: Most ukulele players use both notation systems: chord diagrams for strumming songs and TAB for learning specific melodies or fingerpicking patterns.

Appendix I

Ukulele Buying Guide

Choosing your first ukulele can be overwhelming. This guide helps you make an informed decision based on your needs and budget.

I.1 What to Look For

Size

Review the sizes in Section 1.4. For most beginners:

- **Concert or Tenor**: Best all-around choice—comfortable to play with good sound
- **Soprano**: Classic ukulele sound, best for smaller hands or portability
- **Baritone**: Only if you want a deeper, guitar-like sound (different tuning)

Construction Quality

Top wood Solid wood tops produce better sound than laminate. Look for "solid top" or "solid spruce/cedar/mahogany."

Frets Should be smooth with no sharp edges. Run your hand along the neck edge.

Tuners Geared tuners (metal with visible gears) hold tune better than friction pegs.

Action Strings shouldn't be too high above the fretboard. Press the 12th fret—it should be easy.

Intonation Play the 12th fret harmonic, then fret the 12th fret. They should match in pitch.

Budget Guidelines

Range	What to Expect	Recommendation
Very low budget	Toy quality, poor intonation	Avoid for serious learning
Budget	Playable beginner instruments	Good starting point
Mid-range	Solid tops, better tone	Best value for beginners
Upper-range	Professional quality	When you're committed
Premium	Handcrafted, premium woods	Experienced players

Tip: A mid-range ukulele from a reputable brand will serve most beginners well for years. Avoid the cheapest options—frustrating playability can kill motivation.

I.2 Reputable Brands

These brands consistently produce quality instruments at various price points:

- **Beginner-friendly**: Kala, Lanikai, Cordoba, Donner, Flight
- **Mid-range**: Ohana, Enya, Luna, Oscar Schmidt
- **Premium**: Kamaka, KoAloha, Kanile'a, Pono, Martin

I.3 Where to Buy

Local music store Best option—you can try before buying and get setup help.

Online retailers Wider selection; look for good return policies.

Direct from manufacturer Often best prices for specific brands.

I.4 Essential Accessories

- **Tuner**: Clip-on chromatic tuner—essential
- **Gig bag or case**: Protects during transport
- **Extra strings**: Keep a spare set
- **Strap** (optional): Helpful for standing or larger ukuleles
- **Capo** (optional): Changes key without relearning chords
- **Music stand** (optional): Keeps books/tablets at eye level

I.5 Before You Buy: Checklist

1. Does it stay in tune? (Have someone tune it, wait 5 minutes, check again)
2. Are the frets smooth with no sharp edges?
3. Is the action comfortable? (Not too high, not buzzing)
4. Does it sound good to you? (Trust your ears)
5. Does it feel comfortable in your hands?

Tip: If buying online, choose retailers with good return policies. A “setup” service (where a technician adjusts the action and intonation) is worth the small extra cost.

Appendix J

Standard Music Notation

This appendix introduces how to read **standard music notation**—the universal written language of music. If you already read chord diagrams and TAB comfortably, you have a head start: the concepts of pitch, rhythm, and fret positions will feel familiar. Standard notation simply represents them in a more compact, universally understood form.

J.1 Why Learn Standard Notation?

Section 1.9 noted that most ukulele players get by with chord diagrams and TAB. So why learn a third system? A few situations make it worthwhile:

- **Classical and jazz repertoire**—much of this music is published only in standard notation.
- **Ensemble playing**—when you sit in with other instrumentalists reading from a shared score, standard notation is the common language.
- **Deeper theory understanding**—intervals, scales, and chord construction are easier to visualize on a staff than in TAB.
- **Wider resource access**—piano method books, vocal sheet music, and orchestral scores all use standard notation, and you can adapt any of them for ukulele.

No Need to Master It Overnight: You don't have to become a fluent sight-reader to benefit. Even a basic ability to decode a melody on the staff opens up a huge library of music.

J.2 The Staff

Standard notation is written on a **staff** (plural: *staves*)—five horizontal lines with four spaces between them. Each line and space represents a different pitch.

At the beginning of the staff you will see a **treble clef** (also called the G clef). The treble clef tells you which pitches the lines and spaces represent. All ukulele music is written in the treble clef.

Ledger lines are short extra lines drawn above or below the staff for notes that fall outside its five-line range. Middle C, for example, sits on one ledger line below the treble staff.

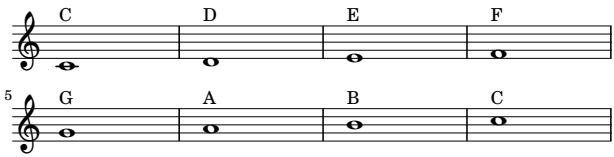
J.3 Notes on the Staff

Each line and space of the treble staff corresponds to a note name. Two classic mnemonics help you remember them:

Lines (bottom to top) **E–G–B–D–F** — *Every Good Boy Does Fine*

Spaces (bottom to top) **F–A–C–E** — the word *FACE*

The illustration below shows whole notes from C to C with letter names:



Notes on the treble staff from C to C.

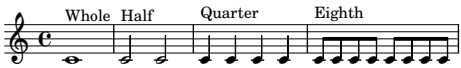
The Ukulele Range

In standard tuning (high G), the ukulele's range spans roughly from **C4** (middle C) to **A5**. That means most ukulele music sits comfortably on or near the treble staff, with only occasional ledger lines.

J.4 Note Values and Rests

The *shape* of a note tells you how long to hold it:

Note	Duration	Beats (in 4/4)
Whole note	Longest common value	4
Half note	Half of a whole note	2
Quarter note	One beat	1
Eighth note	Half a beat	½
Sixteenth note	Quarter of a beat	¼



Whole, half, quarter, and eighth notes on a single pitch.

Every note value has a corresponding **rest** symbol that indicates silence for the same duration.

Dotted Notes and Ties

A **dot** after a note adds half its value. For example, a dotted half note lasts three beats (2 + 1). A **tie** is a curved line connecting two notes of the same pitch; you play the first note and hold it for the combined duration.

J.5 Time Signatures

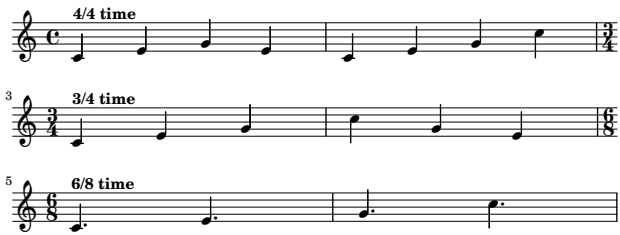
A **time signature** appears at the beginning of a piece (and wherever the meter changes). It consists of two stacked numbers:

Top number How many beats per measure.

Bottom number Which note value gets one beat (4 = quarter note, 8 = eighth note).

Common time signatures in ukulele music:

Signature	Feel	Common In
4/4	Four even beats	Pop, rock, Hawaiian
3/4	Waltz feel (three beats)	Waltzes, some ballads
6/8	Two groups of three	Folk, slow ballads



Short phrases in 4/4, 3/4, and 6/8 time.

Bar Lines and Repeat Signs

Vertical **bar lines** divide the staff into **measures** (bars). A **double bar line** marks the end of a section, and a **final bar line** (thin–thick) marks the end of the piece. **Repeat signs** (a double bar with two dots) tell you to go back and play the enclosed passage again.

J.6 Key Signatures

A **key signature** is a group of sharps (♯) or flats (♭) placed after the clef at the start of each staff line. It tells you which notes are consistently raised or lowered throughout the piece, defining the **key**. The most ukulele-friendly keys and their key signatures:

Major Key	Relative Minor	Sharps/Flats	Signature
C major	A minor	None	(no sharps or flats)
G major	E minor	1 sharp	F♯
F major	D minor	1 flat	B♭
D major	B minor	2 sharps	F♯, C♯
A major	F♯ minor	3 sharps	F♯, C♯, G♯

Start with C Major: C major has no sharps or flats, and many common ukulele songs are in this key. It's the easiest key signature to read.

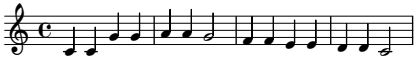
J.7 Reading Ukulele Music

The main challenge of standard notation on the ukulele is that the same pitch can often be played at more than one fret position. The table below maps staff notes to common fret positions in standard tuning:

Staff Note	String	Fret	Alternate Position
C4 (middle C)	C string	Open	—
D4	C string	2	—
E4	C string	4	E string open
F4	E string	1	—
G4	E string	3	G string open
A4	A string	Open	E string 5
B4	A string	2	—
C5	A string	3	—
D5	A string	5	—
E5	A string	7	—

Example: "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star"

Here is the opening melody in standard notation:



"Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" in standard notation.

And the same passage in TAB for comparison:

Twinkle Twinkle — TAB

```
A |------------------0---0------|
E |-----------3---3-----------3--|
C |---0---0----------------------|
G |------------------------------|

A |------------------------------|
E |---1---1---0---0--------------|
C |------------------2---2---0--|
G |------------------------------|
```

Notice how the standard notation shows pitch contour and rhythm at a glance, while TAB shows the exact fret positions. Used together, they give you the complete picture.

J.8 Common Symbols

Beyond notes and rests, standard notation uses a variety of symbols:

Dynamics

Dynamics indicate how loudly or softly to play:

Symbol	Name	Meaning
pp	Pianissimo	Very soft
p	Piano	Soft
mp	Mezzo-piano	Moderately soft
mf	Mezzo-forte	Moderately loud
f	Forte	Loud
ff	Fortissimo	Very loud

Tempo Markings

Tempo markings appear above the staff and tell you the speed:

Marking	Approximate BPM
Largo	40–60
Adagio	60–76
Andante	76–108
Moderato	108–120
Allegro	120–156
Presto	156–200

Articulation and Expression

Symbol / Term	Meaning
Accent (>)	Play the note with extra emphasis
Fermata	Hold the note longer than its written value
Slur (curved line)	Play the connected notes smoothly (legato)
Tie (curved line, same pitch)	Sustain across the combined note values
Staccato (dot above/below)	Play short and detached

J.9 Standard Notation vs TAB vs Chord Diagrams

Feature	Standard Notation	TAB	Chord Diagrams
Shows pitch	Yes (on staff)	Indirectly (fret)	No
Shows rhythm	Yes (note shapes)	Sometimes	No
Shows fingering	No	Fret numbers	Finger numbers
Best for	Melodies, theory	Melodies, riffs	Strumming songs
Universal	All instruments	Fretted instruments	Fretted instruments
Learning curve	Moderate	Easy	Easy

Use All Three: Each system has strengths. Many ukulele songbooks combine standard notation on top, TAB in the middle, and chord symbols above—giving you three ways to read the same music. As you grow as a musician, being comfortable with all three makes you versatile.

Glossary of Terms

Barre Chord

A chord shape where one finger (usually the index) presses across multiple strings, acting as a moveable nut. Allows playing any chord using the same shape at different fret positions. 39

Beat

The basic unit of time in music; the pulse you tap your foot to. 19

Bridge

The wooden component on the ukulele body that anchors the strings and transfers their vibration to the soundboard. 4

Capo

A clamp device placed across the fretboard to raise the pitch of all strings, effectively changing the key without changing chord fingerings. 39, 67

Chord

Three or more notes played simultaneously. Built by stacking intervals from a scale. 12

Chord Diagram

A visual representation showing finger positions for playing a chord. 9

Chord Progression

A sequence of chords that forms the harmonic structure of a song. Example: The I-V-vi-IV progression (C-G-Am-F in the key of C) is used in countless pop songs. 17

Chord Substitution

Replacing one chord with another that shares similar harmonic function. Example: Substituting Am7 for C (they share three notes) or using a tritone substitution in jazz. 77

Chunk

A percussive muted strum, made either with the strumming hand's palm or by relaxing the fretting hand while strumming. 23, 58

Circle of Fifths

A diagram showing the relationship between the twelve keys, arranged by fifths. 96

Clawhammer

A picking technique from banjo, adapted for ukulele. Uses a downward striking motion with the fingernail rather than upward plucking. Creates a distinctive rhythmic, old-time sound. 85

Comping

Short for "accompanying." The rhythmic chord playing used to support a melody or soloist, especially in jazz. 75

Dominant Seventh (7)

A chord built from a major triad plus a minor seventh interval. Creates tension that resolves to the I chord. 51

Downstrum

Strumming from the top string (G) toward the bottom string (A). 20

Dynamics

Variations in volume while playing—soft to loud and everything in between. 24

Fingerstyle

A playing approach using fingers instead of a pick, encompassing fingerpicking patterns, classical technique, and solo arrangements. 81

Fret

The metal strips embedded in the fretboard that divide it into half-step intervals. 4

Fretboard

The flat surface on the front of the neck where you press the strings. 4

Half Step

The smallest interval in Western music; one fret on the ukulele. 49

Hammer-On

A technique where you sound a note by "hammering" a fretting finger onto the string without picking. Creates smooth, connected notes. Example: Play open G string, then hammer your finger onto the 2nd fret. 89

Harmonics

Bell-like tones produced by lightly touching (not pressing) the string at specific points while plucking. Natural harmonics occur at frets 12, 7, and 5. 87

Headstock

The top part of the ukulele where the tuning pegs are located. 4

Interval

The distance between two notes, measured in half-steps or by name (third, fifth, etc.). 49

Key

The tonal center of a piece of music; the "home base" chord and scale. 64

Low G Tuning

An alternative tuning where the G string is tuned an octave lower than standard re-entrant tuning, using a thicker G string (wound or unwound fluorocarbon). Provides extended bass range and a fuller sound, popular for fingerstyle and chord-melody arrangements. Requires a low-G string set. 6

Major Scale

The most common scale in Western music, following the pattern W-W-H-W-W-W-H. 63, 64, 94

Major Seventh (maj7)

A chord combining a major triad with a major seventh interval. Has a soft, dreamy quality. 52

Measure (Bar)

A segment of time containing a specified number of beats, defined by the time signature. 19

Metronome

A device that produces a steady beat to help maintain consistent tempo. 20

Minor Seventh (m7)

A chord combining a minor triad with a minor seventh interval. 52

Mode

A scale derived from the major scale by starting on a different degree. Examples: Dorian, Mixolydian. 97

Nashville Number System

A method of notating chords using numbers instead of letter names, making transposition easy. 66

Nut

A small piece (usually plastic, bone, or synthetic material) at the top of the fretboard that holds strings in position and determines their spacing. 4

Octave

An interval spanning twelve half-steps, where the higher note has twice the frequency of the lower. 49

Pentatonic Scale

A five-note scale commonly used for improvisation and melody. The major pentatonic removes the 4th and 7th degrees; the minor pentatonic removes the 2nd and 6th. Example: C major pentatonic is C-D-E-G-A. 98

Pull-Off

The opposite of a hammer-on: pluck a fretted note, then "pull" your finger off while another finger holds a lower note on the same string. Creates descending slurs without picking. 89

Re-entrant Tuning

Standard ukulele tuning (GCEA) where the 4th string (G) is tuned higher than the 3rd string (C). 6

Relative Key

A major key and minor key that share the same notes but have different tonal centers (e.g., C major and A minor). 95

Root

The fundamental note of a chord that gives it its name. 50

Saddle

A thin piece on the bridge that the strings rest on, transmitting vibration to the body. 4

Scale

A sequence of notes in ascending or descending order, following a specific pattern of intervals. 63

Slide

A technique where you fret a note, pick it, then slide your finger up or down to a different fret while the note sustains. Creates smooth pitch transitions. 90

Soundboard

The top (face) of the ukulele body that vibrates to produce sound. 4

Sound Hole

The circular opening in the soundboard that projects sound outward. 4

Standard Notation

Traditional music notation using a five-line staff with note symbols indicating pitch and rhythm. Universal across instruments but has a steeper learning curve than TAB or chord diagrams. See Appendix J for a guided introduction. 10

Strumming

Playing multiple strings together with a sweeping motion of the hand. 19

Syncopation

Rhythmic emphasis on normally weak beats or between beats. 57

Tablature (TAB)

A visual notation system using numbers on lines to show which fret to play on which string. Easier to read than standard notation; widely used in online resources. See Appendix H. 10

Tempo

The speed of music, measured in beats per minute (BPM). 19

Time Signature

A notation indicating how many beats are in each measure and what note value gets one beat (e.g., 4/4, 3/4, 6/8). 19

Transpose

To change the key of a piece of music. 65

Tremolo

A technique creating sustained melody by rapidly repeating notes with ring, middle, and index fingers while the thumb plays bass. Creates a shimmering, continuous tone. 85

Triad

A three-note chord built from root, third, and fifth. 50

Tritone

An interval of six half-steps (three whole tones); creates a tense, unresolved sound. 77

Tuning

The pitches to which the strings are set. Standard ukulele tuning is GCEA. 6

Tuning Pegs (Tuners)

The mechanical devices on the headstock used to adjust string tension and pitch. 4

Upstrum

Strumming from the bottom string (A) toward the top string (G). 21

Voicing

A specific arrangement of the notes within a chord; different voicings produce different sounds from the same chord. 75

Whole Step

An interval of two half-steps; two frets on the ukulele. 49